

COLLEGE FOOTBALL PREVIEW

Sports Illustrated

34 PAGES OF
SCOUTING
REPORTS

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UP THE BCS

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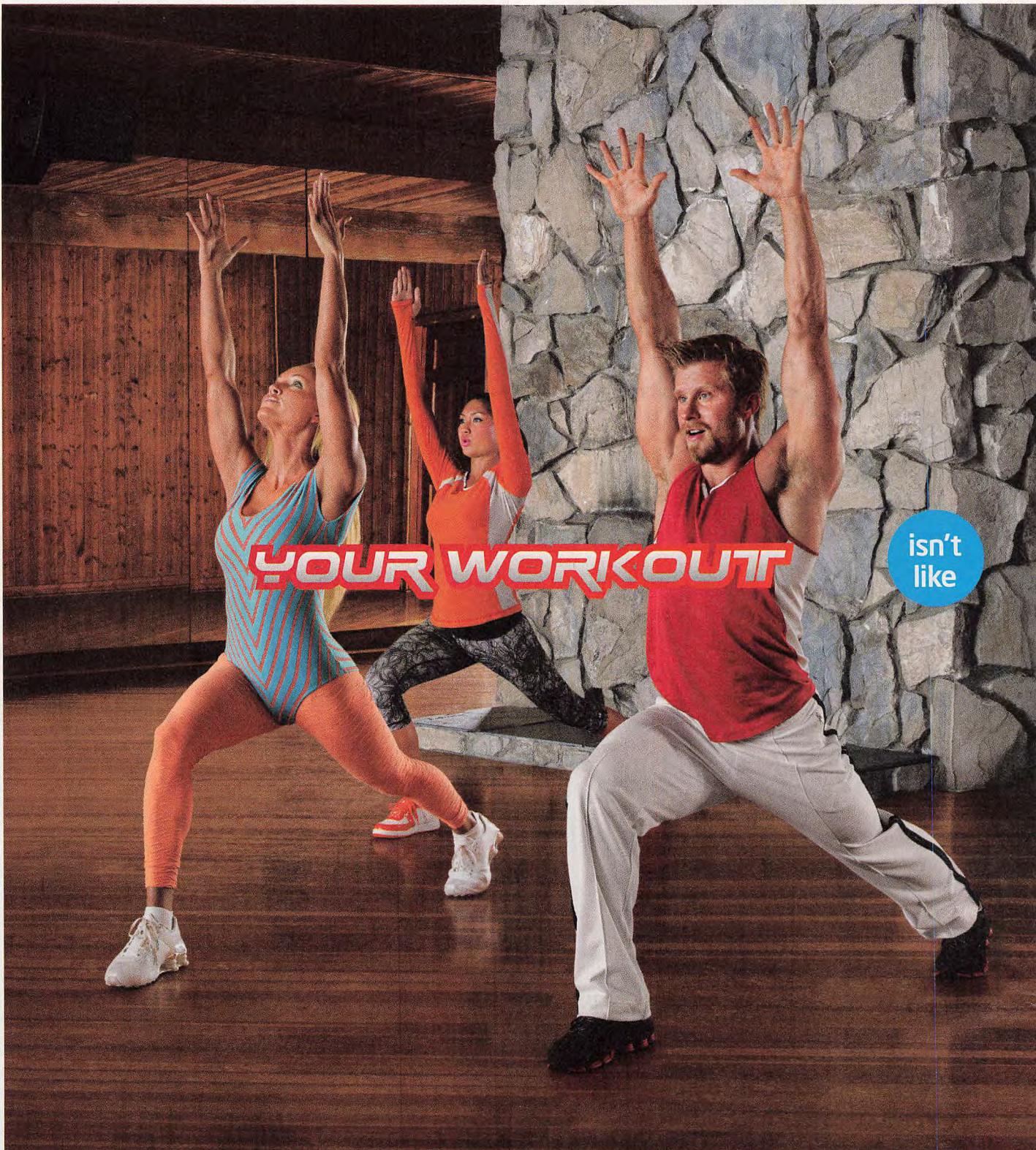
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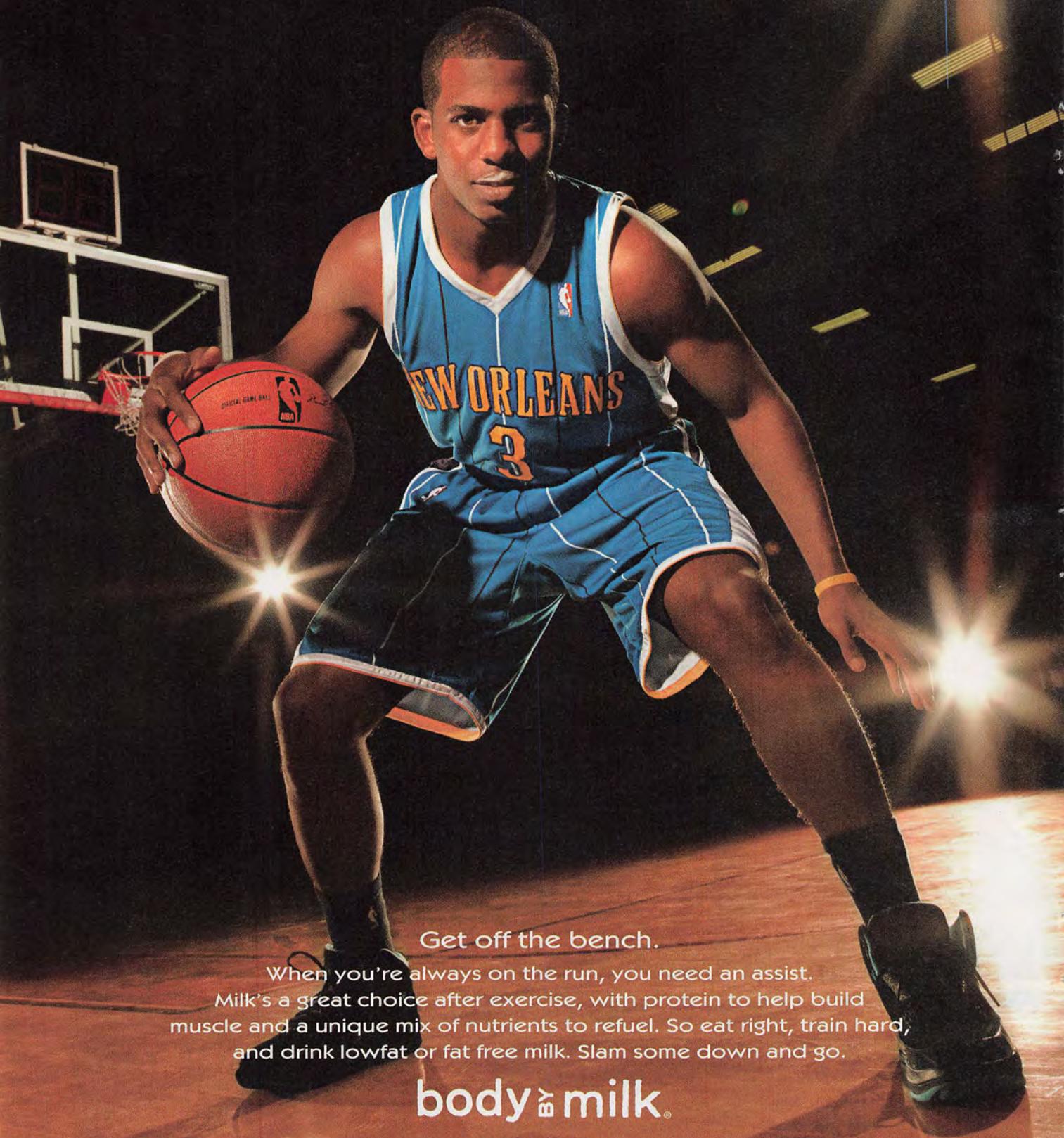
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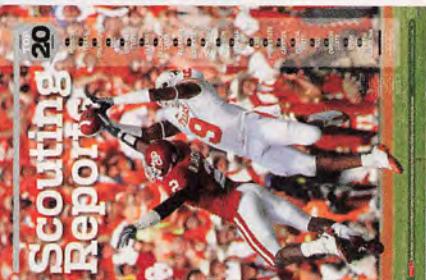
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Lineup

COLLEGE FOOTBALL PREVIEW



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Three resurgent programs—Oregon, Oklahoma State and Ole Miss—have what it takes to become BCS spoilers and title contenders **By Austin Murphy**

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ON THE COVER Photographs by Peter Read Miller



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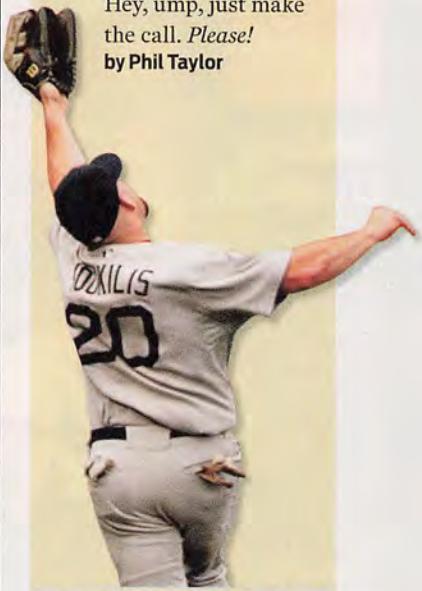
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Hey, ump, just make the call. *Please!*

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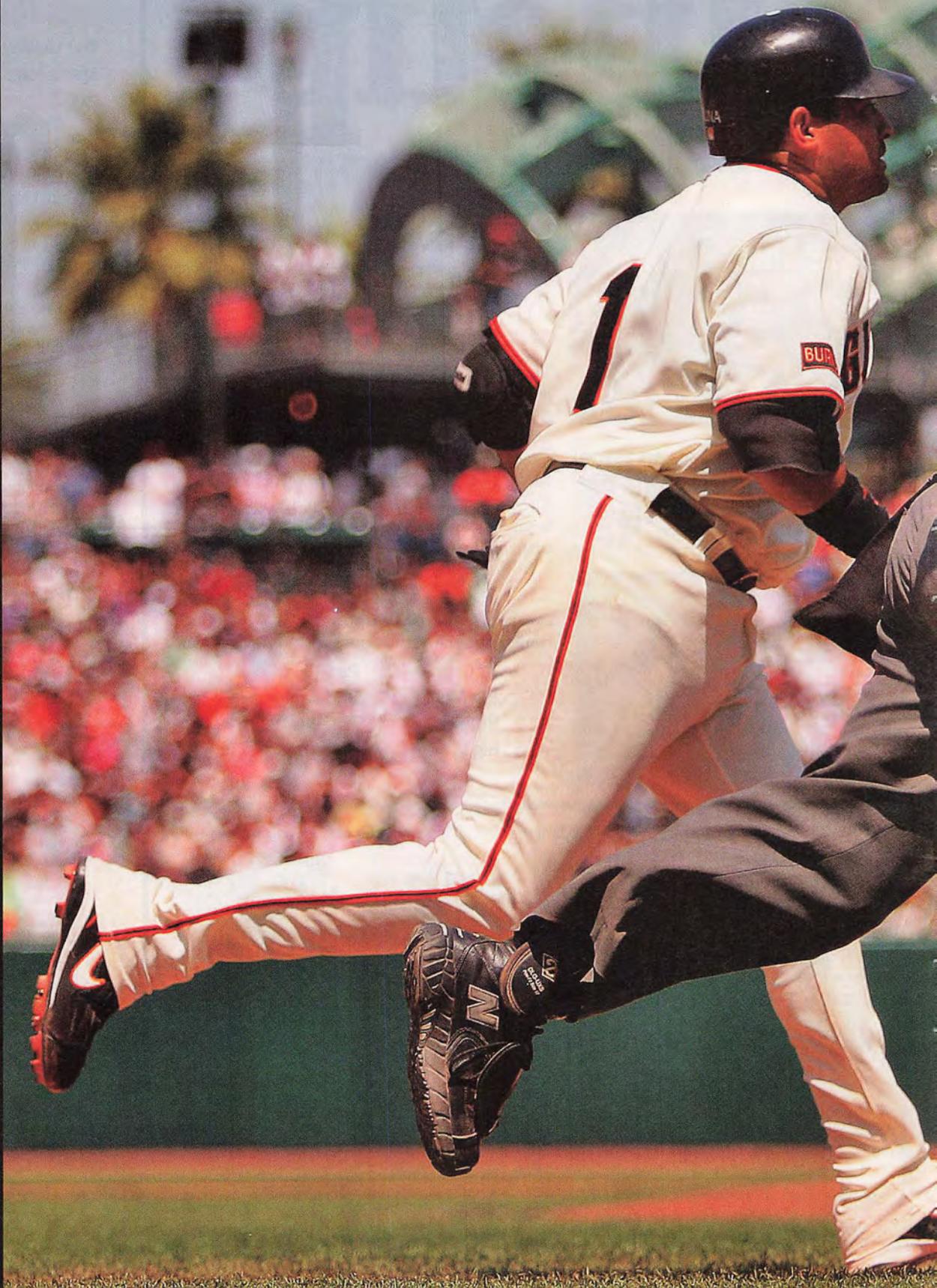


Kevin Youkilis and the Red Sox are coming up short (page 33).

LEADING OFF

Seeing Double?

► Home plate umpire D.J. Reyburn and Bengie Molina of the Giants ran along the first base line in San Francisco on Sunday, eyeing the catcher's sixth-inning shot into the rightfield corner—a potential extra-base hit or foul? The ball was caught in foul territory; Molina wound up 0 for 4 in a 5–2 loss to the Reds.





LEADING OFF

Drippin' And Grippin'

► Broncos rookie wide receiver Nate Swift was experiencing high flood pressure as he lunged for the loose ball while being hosed down in a fumble recovery drill at training camp on Aug. 5 in Englewood, Colo.





LEADING OFF

Crash Landon

► Galaxy forward Landon Donovan was wiped out by Revolution midfielder Jeff Larentowicz during the second half of last Saturday's game in Foxborough, Mass. Donovan curled a high shot inside the far post for the first goal in L.A.'s 2-1 win. The Galaxy is 2-0-1 since the return of David Beckham.

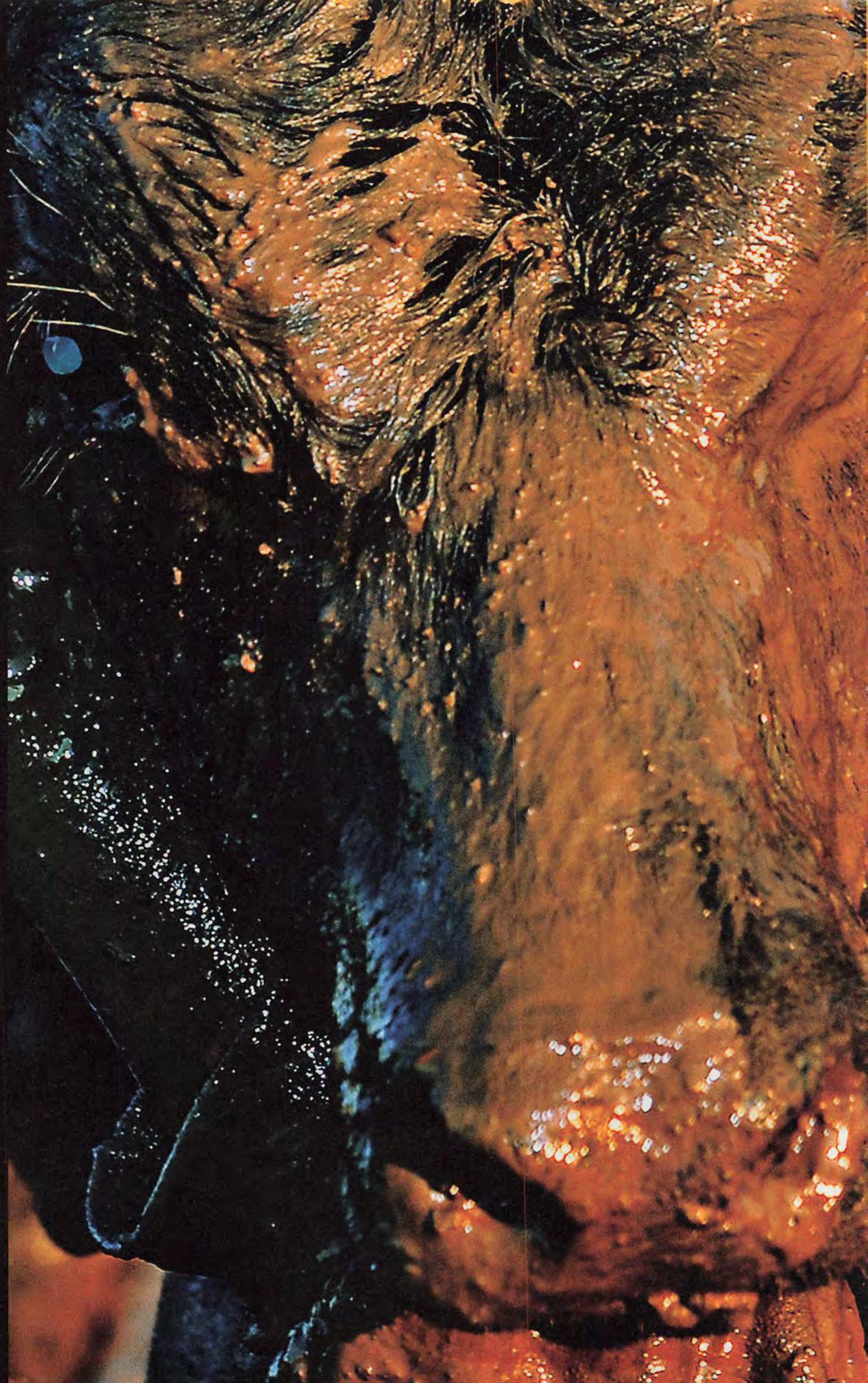




LEADING OFF

Calf Muscle

► A high school competitor in the annual Calf Scramble at the Clark County Fair in Springfield, Ohio, dragged this 250-pound farm animal through the mud and into the center circle on July 31. (A possible head-to-head matchup is one reason entrants must wear a helmet.) Those who wrestle their calves into the circle get to keep them and sell them at the fair the following year, with the proceeds usually going toward their college education.





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Letters

Tim Tebow may be like Bronko Nagurski now, but someday he'll be the next Billy Graham.

Harry Spratlin, Columbia, S.C.

I am an Oklahoma fan, and when I attended the BCS championship game in January, I said more than once, "I hate Tim #\$\$!#\$\$% Tebow." After reading your article (*You Gotta Love Tim Tebow*, July 27) and knowing the impact that guys like him have had on my own life as a sometimes struggling Christian and recovering drug addict and alcoholic, all I can say is that this world needs more Tim Tebows—OU nemesis or not.

Jeremy Martin, Tulsa

You gotta love Tim Tebow? I sure don't! His message of literal Christian fundamentalism is wreaking havoc on women, gays and nonbelievers all over the world. How about spreading a message of redemption and hope without the religious intolerance? That would be a Tim Tebow I could love!

Michael Rozzen, San Diego

I am a Christian. However, I dislike it when athletes claim God is on their side, as Tebow did before the national championship game against Oklahoma. Does God really care about the outcome of a football game? I think this kind

of belief diminishes my God and heaps inevitable ridicule on my faith.

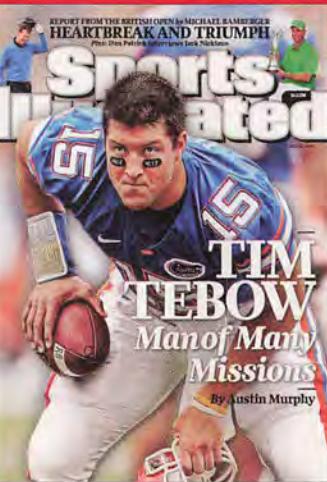
Roberto Pacheco, Miami

On the Bob Tebow Evangelistic Association website, it is estimated that 75% of Filipinos have never once heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Given that Filipinos are 80% Roman Catholic, the target of the ministry is obvious. And while Bob, Tim's father, may strike a warm, inclusive note in an interview, his own website does not, stating, "We reject the modern ecumenical movement." In other words, when it comes to salvation, Catholics need not apply. Tim is featured prominently on his father's website. So, no, I don't gotta love Tim Tebow.

Sean O'Brien, Milwaukee

Your story mentions "an embarrassing string of arrests" for the Florida football team. In fact, the team has had 24 arrests in the past four years. Until the Florida players' actions more closely reflect their leader's values, Tebow's exhortations ring hollow.

Kathryn Schuessler
Mishawaka, Ind.



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wonderful, and I feel sorry that he is being made to feel as if he rained on Watson's parade. Cink was the winner and a very worthy one at that.

Joan Galvin, Clearwater, Fla.

In 1996 the U.S. Open was held at Oakland Hills, close to where I live, and I managed to get a note put into Watson's locker, asking if he could call my wife, Patty, an avid golfer and great fan of his, who was dying of cancer. Tom did call, and he talked to Patty for 15 minutes, giving her a joyous story to tell until her death eight months later. After Turnberry, I sent Tom another note, telling him that he would always be the greatest champion of all in my household.

Ronald Gries
Bloomfield Hills, Mich.

Growing Support

I am a true maize-and-blue fan, but I could not be prouder to have a basketball coach like Michigan State's Tom Izzo (*The Fire Still Burns*, July 27) in our state. These are hard times in Michigan. Izzo has what every person here looks for in a coach: integrity and compassion.

Dick Trombley, Troy, Mich.

It was refreshing to see a Christian's faith chronicled so richly and without ridicule.

Lori Arnold, Santee, Calif.

Bring back Kenny Stabler!

Chris Dyer, San Francisco



Pulling for Ol' Tom

As a senior citizen—much more senior than Tom Watson—I was keeping my fingers crossed that he would be triumphant in the British Open at Turnberry (*Heartbreaker*, July 27). However, Stewart Cink was

Izzo showed me his dedication to Detroit during the Stanley Cup finals. I drove five hours with my son to Pittsburgh to see Game 6, and I thought I was a dedicated Penguins fan. To my surprise Izzo was sitting right behind me, quietly supporting the Red Wings. After the Penguins' victory he took the time to speak with us and have our picture taken with him. Coach Izzo has two fans from western New York.

David Korpel, Rochester, N.Y.

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Letters

Your story neglected to mention a key reason the Spartans had trouble recruiting Detroit talent for years: Michigan booster Ed Martin, who made payments of at least \$616,000 in the 1980s and '90s to steer prize recruits to Ann Arbor with proceeds from an illegal gambling operation. The scandal was one of the biggest of its kind in NCAA history, and Tom Izzo and his predecessor, Jud Heathcote, were the primary victims.

Neil Geoghegan
Downington, Pa.

Aces on the Bases

Albert Chen's story on Carl Crawford (*The Running Man*, July 27) was well done, and the Rays' leftfielder is a great talent. However, any article that discusses basestealing needs to mention Boston's Jacoby Ellsbury, who is second in the majors.

Will Hausman
Lake Worth, Fla.

Your story quotes the 2006 book *Baseball Between the Numbers* as saying that Rickey Henderson's 1985 record-setting 130-steal season was only two runs better than Pete Incaviglia's the same year. But Henderson set the record in 1982, and Incaviglia didn't make it to the majors until 1986.

Paul Borelli, Austin

EDITOR'S NOTE: The book, which was quoted inaccurately, correctly makes its comparison between Henderson's 1982 season and Incaviglia's rookie season.

Inspiring One Another

Thank you for highlighting the charitable giving of linebacker Ryan Nece (POINT AFTER, July 27). As a high school teacher I plan to share this article with my students next month, and I hope a new class of students will do what Nece asks his gift recipients to do and pay it forward.

Suzanne Sanders
Boca Raton, Fla.

Isn't it amazing? Five minutes ago I never heard of Ryan Nece. Now he's my favorite player in the NFL.

Harry Miller
Lexington, Ky.

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Scorecard

Friends in High Places

Why have Woods and Federer become pals? Why wouldn't they? | BY S.L. PRICE

The first hint that it might be more than just some marketing masterstroke—a Nike-inspired, Gillette-fostered, IMG-brokered pairing with about as much authenticity as a reality-show engagement—came in June. It's hard to say which of Tiger Woods's revelations in a press conference was more startling: The fact that he and Roger Federer text each other "every day" or that Woods actually calls him Fed. Daily communication is one thing, but for Woods the bestowing of a clunky nickname is the supreme sign of acceptance. If the guy ever tees it up with the President, he'll be calling him B.O. by the fourth green.

The second hint came five days later. While on the practice range at the AT&T National, Woods got wind that Federer had just won Wimbledon to break their tie of 14 majors apiece; sent Fed his now-famous "Great job. Now it's my turn" text; and then shot a 67 to win the tournament. By the time Woods next popped up in public, calling Federer "great" and "phenomenal" at the British Open, their symbiosis had sparked an Internet-fueled bedazzlement not seen since ultrahumans Brad and Angelina joined forces. Woods declared

that "our texts back and forth have always been jabby—but also extremely supportive of one another—and that's what friends do," and what we had on our hands became clear.

Dude, it's a *bromance*. And though there's no precedent for the most dominant golfer and tennis player in history to engage in a mutual man crush, you can't say we haven't been asking for it. In the 40 years since *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* gave hunks permission to hang out on-screen and *Brian's Song* gave jocks permission to cry, male bonding has become a cultural staple played out nightly in *SportsCenter* pairings, banter-crusted TV shows and dopey beer ads. It's no coincidence, of course, that such ads cluster around sporting events or that every studio panel (Charles! Ernie! Kenny!) strives for a locker room's crap-giving tone. Sports is the ultimate buddy flick.

Still, it took Woods a while to warm up. When the two first met, before Federer's 2006 U.S. Open win, there was a definite older-brother vibe in the air: Woods was 30 with 12 majors in hand—compared with the 25-year-old Federer's eight—and Fed broke prematch protocol by eagerly



Only Tiger and Fed understand how greatness isolates them ATOP THEIR LONELY GAMES.

chatting up Woods minutes before taking the court, then played the final conscious of having "someone you really look up to" watching. When Woods asked, in the locker room afterward, about having a higher gear on-call, Federer felt an instant connection. "For me it's hard to describe to people how it really feels out there," Federer said. "With Tiger, I knew he knows exactly what I'm talking about."

But if not yet a meeting of equals, the uniting of Woods and Federer still seemed, well, profound. Their talent left so-called peers breathless; greatness had only further isolated both men atop their lonely games. Other

players competed for tournament titles, but in Jack Nicklaus's all-time record of 18 major titles and Pete Sampras's 14, Woods and Federer battled history. Who else in the world could understand?

Sports has had crossover friendships before: Babe Ruth encouraged football star Red Grange; NFL great Jim Brown was in Cassius Clay's hotel room the night Clay resolved to become Muhammad Ali. But when Federer won the 2007 Australian Open and received his first scorekeeping taunt from Woods—a text reading, "12 to 10"—a wholly postmodern, public referendum took flight. "Keep up, buddy," Woods taunted in a Nike ad, and as each subsequent title fueled the unanswerable debate over who was the greater athlete, they appeared in one shaving-cream ad after another, cutting up like childhood chums.

The rub is that the aired ads have been, well, fake: None so far were filmed with the two men on the same continent; in the best exchange, when Federer strokes a startled Tiger's cheek and giggles, he's actually touching a stand-in. Which is perfect, when you realize how little time the two have actually spent together. Yes, Federer has walked the course a few times when Tiger played, and they've eaten dinner together at least once; word is Woods helped rebuild Federer's confidence during his darkest moments over the past year. But . . . "friends?"

"A man must eat a peck of salt with his friend before he knows him," Cervantes wrote, and Federer and Woods have shared none of the usual male glue—never worked or schooled together, never survived poverty or pain together, never achieved together, never shared a bad bus ride—and haven't played any sport with or against each other. These archcompetitors have literally nothing to lose by being friendly, so their bond can never be as poetic as that between, say, the Williams sisters, who stalk each other with brutal intent while remaining ferociously loyal.

Yet, the idea of Federer and Woods forming a two-headed League of Extraordinary Gentlemen remains compelling, all the more so if Woods can equal Federer's mark of 15 majors this weekend at the PGA Championship. "Success, I guess," Federer said when asked at Wimbledon what they have in common. "When you talk about golf, you talk about Tiger; when you talk about tennis, you talk about me. We have something similar there: our mind-set, our approach. We're very driven. We try to dominate." The two made their career climbs solo, and when the clouds cleared, one was atop Everest and the other on K2. What man wouldn't shout and wave? □

TIM SHAFFER/DEUTSCHE PRESSE-Agentur (HOLLIDAY); KIRBY LEE/IMAGE OF SPORT/US PRESSWIRE (YOUNG); J. MERIC/GETTY IMAGES (HARVEY RAMIREZ); MICHAEL COWHERD/AP (BECKHAM); JOHN BIEBER (FUDOLS)

Who's Hot Who's Not

MATT HOLLIDAY

Acquired from the A's, the slugger had hit .466 with 15 RBIs in 15 games for the Cardinals through Sunday. ("Relentless" is how manager Tony La Russa describes him.) St. Louis led the NL Central, and for Holliday the good news won't end in October: A Scott Boras client, he is due to become a free agent.



JOSH HAMILTON

The revelations of his January drinking escapade and those unseemly bar photos—did he really have to put a shot glass there?—are saddening; the Rangers' outfielder has seemed contrite. Also hurting Texas's playoff hopes: Hamilton's .215 batting average and two homers in his last 36 games.

RODDY WHITE

Three days after losing wideout Harry Douglas for the season (knee), the Falcons ponied up \$50 million over six years to bring back holdout receiver White. More than \$18 million of that is guaranteed—not bad for a guy who was going to make \$2.28 million this season.



VINCE YOUNG

Before the preseason opener in Canton, the Titans' QB said his sights are set on getting into the Hall of Fame. He should think first about securing a starting job. His 5 for 10 with a pick against the Bills looked all too familiar—as did Kerry Collins's leading Tennessee to two TDs.

MARLINS

Can Hanley Ramirez (right), the NL's leading hitter at .348, goose the Marlins past the Phillies? The shortstop's 7 for 16 (plus four RBIs and two stolen bases) keyed a three-game sweep in Philly that put Florida, home for 17 of its next 23, four games back in the East.



LIBERTY

Firing coach Pat Coyle has done nothing to lift the WNBA's losingest Eastern Conference team. A 1-3 start under U.S. Olympic coach Anne Donovan—including an irksome loss in Seattle, where she won the 2004 league title—might have put the postseason out of reach.

DAVID BECKHAM

The sting of the dissing he got in *The Beckham Experiment* may be fading: The Galaxy is unbeaten in three games since his return, and after Becks critic Landon Donovan scored on Sunday he leaped into Beckham's arms. Said Donovan, "He has taken it like a man."



JIM BALSILLIE

The BlackBerry billionaire who wants to buy the Coyotes is not wanted. The NHL asked a judge to throw out Balsillie's bid for the bankrupt team after the league's board voted 26-0 against approving him. Bruins owner Jeremy Jacobs said Balsillie "lacks good character and integrity."

SI PLAYERS MLB POLL



WHICH OPPONING HITTER DO YOU MOST FEAR WITH THE GAME ON THE LINE?

Albert Pujols, Cardinals 1B...	41%
Manny Ramirez, Dodgers LF	18%
Derek Jeter, Yankees SS	6%
Chipper Jones, Braves 3B	3%
Kevin Youkilis, Red Sox 1B.....	3%



FAST FACTS Pujols led the majors with 100 RBIs through Sunday, becoming only the second player with 100 or more in each of his first nine seasons. (Al Simmons of the Philadelphia A's did it for 11 seasons, starting in 1924.) ... Ramirez had 21 RBIs in 31 games since ending his 50-game ban for violating MLB's drug policy.... The Phillies' Ryan Howard, with a big-league-best 226 RBIs since the start of '08, tied for 20th with 0.4% of the vote.

Based on a survey of 380 MLB players

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Scorecard

Signing Off

A garrulous NHL star with style and substance says goodbye

It was tempting for his critics—and there were many over his 20-year career—to dismiss Jeremy Roenick as the NHL's Ugly American, an egocentric attention hog in a sport dominated by quiet Canadians, non-English-speaking Europeans and a conservative, team-first ethos. But then Roenick, who retired last week at age 39, would probably have taken it as a compliment. Nicknamed Styles, he understood that it took something beyond hard work during the game and bland quotes after it to put fannies in NHL seats. "This is the first place I can entertain, be myself," Roenick told SI a few weeks into his first season with the L.A. Kings in 2005. "They get it here. They understand the entertainment factor."

Not that Styles was short on substance. In stints with the Blackhawks (1988–96), the Coyotes (1996–2001), the Flyers ('01–05) and then, in his hockey dote, the Kings, Phoenix again and finally the Sharks, the Boston native proved himself to be a talented scorer

and supremely tough. The center's 513 goals are the third most by a U.S.-born player. He never won a Stanley Cup—his one trip to the finals was with Chicago in 1992—but he was a money player. The six goals he scored in post-season Game 7s are the second-most alltime.

As a talker Roenick was in a league of his own, eager to speak the truth about the league ("Our sport is still great, it's just ruled by Neanderthal people," he once said), players (the union "might not have been right" during the 2004–05 lockout) and fans (he hissed that those who thought players were spoiled could "kiss my ass"). But his chattiness wasn't just self-promotion. It was a way of drawing attention to the sport, something the NHL desperately needs as it slides further from the mainstream. Whether his résumé is strong enough for the Hall of Fame is open to debate. But there's no arguing that Styles was great for the game. —S.C.



TOTAL PACKAGE
For 20 years, Roenick made news with his stick or his shtick.

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SIGN OF THE APOCALYPSE

Appalachian State's All-America QB, Armanti Edwards, will miss the rest of preseason practice after suffering a deep foot laceration when he slipped while pushing a lawn mower uphill.



For the Record

Won The U.S. Women's Amateur, Jennifer Song (*above*). The 19-year-old, who also won the U.S. Women's Amateur Public Links in June, is the second woman to win two USGA championships in the same year; it was first done by Pearl Sinn of South Korea in 1988. On Sunday at Old Warson Country Club in St. Louis, Song rallied from four holes down to beat 17-year-old Jennifer Johnson of La Quinta, Calif., 3 and 1. "I may have looked calm outside," said Song, a USC sophomore who was born in Ann Arbor, Mich., and moved to South Korea as a child, "but it was like a volcano eruption inside my body."

Charged With robbery after an altercation with a Buffalo cabdriver, former NHL rookie of the year Patrick Kane. The Blackhawks winger, 20, and his cousin James Kane, 21, left Buffalo's nightclub district in a taxi early on Sunday morning; when they reached their destination, they allegedly argued with the driver because he didn't have

20 cents in change to give them. The driver, Jan Radecki, 60, told police that James Kane ripped the money the cousins had given him out of his hand and both Kanes then punched him in the head. Patrick Kane was arrested and charged with robbery and misdemeanor counts of criminal mischief and theft of services.

Denied That he has used steroids, Red Sox slugger David Ortiz, whose name, *The New York Times* had reported, was on the list of players who failed MLB's 2003 test for performance-enhancing drugs. Last Saturday, Ortiz said the positive test was likely triggered by an over-the-counter supplement. (The *Times* report did not specify the substance, and the list is under court seal.) MLB, which intended the test results to be anonymous, said on Saturday that despite widespread reports that 104 players failed tests in '03, the actual number is no more than 96 and that 13 of those positives are disputed by the players' union.

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Sarah: Saw Bob today.

Dave: Heard his father passed. So sad. Did Bob and Sue take over the house? That was the plan.

Sarah: No, they had to sell. Estate taxes.

Dave: Man...

Sarah: So, what would happen to mom's house?

Dave: ???!



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Go Figure

21

Players on the Indians' 25-man Opening Day roster who have been traded, demoted or placed on the disabled list during the season.

\$16 million

Amount that Indians president Paul Dolan says the club will lose this season, even after the July trades of high-priced stars Cliff Lee and Victor Martinez.

6

Major leaguers who have had at least 250 home runs, 2,000 hits, 1,000 runs, 1,000 RBIs, 1,000 walks and 300 stolen bases; Angels outfielder Bobby Abreu joined the club last week.

26,254,000

Americans who played basketball at some point in 2008, making hoops the most popular team sport according to the Sporting Goods Manufacturers Association's annual participation survey.

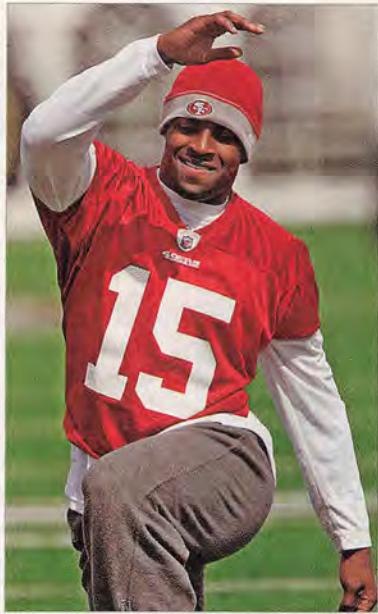
1,127,000

Americans who played lacrosse last year, making it the team sport with the largest increase (117.6%) in participation since 2000.

1,404

Days Royals lefty Bruce Chen went without a win before he beat the Mariners last Thursday; his previous victory came on Oct. 2, 2005, as a member of the Orioles.

Threatening To sit out the season and reenter the NFL draft next spring, wideout Michael Crabtree (right), the 49ers' first-round choice. Crabtree, a former Texas Tech All-America who was the No. 10 pick in April, is in a contract dispute and as of Monday had not reported to training camp. Last week a cousin of his, David Wells, told ESPN that the receiver thinks San Francisco's offers have been "unacceptable." Crabtree reportedly wants a deal similar to the five-year, \$23.5 million package the Raiders gave receiver Darius Heyward-Bey, who was drafted at No. 7.



Adopted By the NCAA, a ban on states that allow sports betting on individual games from hosting championship events. The announcement was made last Thursday, a day after a federal judge denied a legal challenge by the NCAA to a Delaware plan for sports wagering. Delaware is one of four states in which single-game bets are legal (along with Montana, Nevada and Oregon). Delaware plans to implement a lottery allowing such wagers on all sports in September. "Delaware law prohibits any type of sports betting on any [game involving] a Delaware college,"

said a spokesman for governor Jack Markell. "This new policy only serves to punish the very students the NCAA claims to be trying to protect."

Withdrew From the badminton world championships, England, after the event reportedly was threatened by Islamic terrorists. The English team left host city Hyderabad, India, on Sunday. British officials cited reports that a Pakistan-based militant group was targeting the event, which began Monday. It wasn't the first sporting event in Southeast Asia disrupted by terrorists. In March an attack



on the Sri Lankan cricket team in Pakistan, left seven players injured.

Died At age 77 after a heart attack, Peter Kohn, longtime field manager of the Middlebury College lacrosse team. Kohn, who was mildly autistic, began assisting the Panthers in 1981; by the time the Baltimore native retired in 2003 he had become one of the sport's most beloved and inspirational figures. He also served as equipment manager for several U.S. national teams and was inducted into the Lacrosse Hall of Fame in 2004.

Died At age 95, author, screenwriter and boxing scribe Budd Schulberg (below, with Muhammad Ali). In 1947 Schulberg wrote *The Harder They Fall*, a novel about corruption in the boxing world. Seven years later he turned out the script for *On the Waterfront*, which starred Marlon Brando and won Oscars for Best Picture and Best Screenplay. That same year Schulberg was part of the founding staff of SI, and the premiere issue, Aug. 16,

1954, included his column on great boxing bantamweights. Later he worked on investigative pieces that led to corruption reforms by several state boxing commissions. Schulberg was inducted into the Boxing Hall of Fame in 2003.



THEY
SAID IT

Matt Wieters

Orioles catcher, on Baltimore's having five rookie pitchers win their big league debuts this year, the most in a season since the 1888 Chicago White Stockings had six:

"That's when they started baseball, so everybody was debuting."

The Roof Falls In

After a 22-year run, the Arena Football League shuts down

In another era Matt D'Orazio would not have become a professional football star. Like most standout Division III quarterbacks, D'Orazio, who in the late 1990s set Otterbein College records for career passing yards, touchdown passes and total offense, was never invited to an NFL camp, much less drafted. But in 2000 he signed with the Milwaukee Mustangs of the Arena Football League. The rest, at least to die-hard AFL followers, is history.

A two-time ArenaBowl MVP, D'Orazio in 2008 won his second championship, with the Philadelphia Soul, and was the league's MVP. (He won his first title with the Chicago Rush in 2006.) This season he was due to make \$125,000, making him one of the AFL's highest-paid players.

D'Orazio, 32, won't collect those checks. On Aug. 4 the AFL, which in December canceled its 2009 season, announced that it was suspending operations indefinitely. Two franchises had folded, fewer than half of the 15 remaining teams had turned a profit, and the 22-year-old league was struggling to come up with a model that might keep it in business. Even after taking over ownership and operation of



LITTLE
BIG TIME
Midlevel
talents such as
D'Orazio had
their day in the
sun indoors.

all teams, cutting overhead costs by 40% and, with the players' union's consent, slashing player compensation by 50%, the AFL was still facing a \$14 million debt. Unable to find a private equity firm to provide an infusion of cash, the league's owners shut it down.

The AFL may not return, but that doesn't mean the appetite for its quirky,

pinball version of football has gone away. The average AFL crowd was 12,957 in its final season—its highest attendance ever—and its developmental league, af2, keeps on chugging in 25 cities, most of them smaller burgs such as Manchester, N.H., and Stockton, Calif. Of course, while the AFL had a minimum per-game salary of \$1,798, af2 pays its players \$200 a night plus a \$50 bonus for each victory. The league, which has an average attendance of 5,200, says it will remain in the secondary markets, where it's thriving. "We know who we are," says af2 president Jerry Kurz.

The plight of D'Orazio and players like him mirrors that of the AFL itself: He's gotten too big for the small time, but he's too small for the big time. He can't support his wife and two kids on an af2 paycheck, so the Arena league's last MVP is working for a medical equipment sales company in his hometown of Columbus, Ohio. "There aren't too many opportunities for me at this stage of my career," he says. "I was hoping that the league would stick around not just for me, but for guys like me who might be trying to fight their way to the NFL or other leagues."

—Joe Lemire

coach_crabby: cease tweets!!

NFL coaches are flummoxed, something they don't like to be a week into training camp. What to do about Twitter? The league encourages players to join the social media site (about 300 have accounts), and commissioner Roger Goodell even filed dispatches from the NFL draft (nflcommish: "are u ready for some draft picks?"). But among control-freak coaches, there's a wide spectrum of tweet tolerance.

• The Jets are so pro-Twitter that they've hired

a "social networking intern" to help players post updates and photos. "I think our fans find it interesting that [kicker] Jay

Feely's eight-year-old daughter finds it weird he takes naps," a Jets VP said on CNBC.

- Last week Chargers coach Norv Turner pulled Antonio Cromartie (*left*) out of a team meeting to inform the cornerback that he had been fined \$2,500 for the following tweet: "Man we have 2



have the most nasty food of any team. Damn can we upgrade 4 str8 years the same ish maybe that's y we can't we the SB we need."

- Any Packer caught Twittering during team functions will be fined \$1,701 for the transgression. Running back Ryan Grant (9,131 followers) has already adjusted his schedule. He told his tweeps, "Expect tweets in the morning before we go to work, possibly around lunch time and at night once we done...i dont want that heavy fine lol."
- Believe it or not, Bill Parcells is not sweet on the tweet. The

Dolphins' executive VP bans fans and reporters from tweeting, blogging or texting from training camp. Coach Tony Sparano has the same rule for players. "I was thinking about getting an account," nose tackle Jason Ferguson told *The New York Times*, "until I got the information."

- Josh McDaniels is the anti-Parcells. Joked the 33-year-old Broncos coach, "I don't really have a Twitter policy. I don't know what it means; I don't know what it is. I don't know MyFace, Spacebook, Facebook stuff. I don't know what that is either." —Pablo S. Torre



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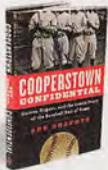


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Scorecard

**HOT
TIP**

Gameplan



WATCH
The PGA
Championship

Phil is back, and Tiger is trying to avoid his first majorless year since 2004. But if form holds, the world's best won't win at Hazeltine National (TNT and CBS). The highest-ranked winner of a major in '09 is British Open champ Stewart Cink (33rd). This could be the first year the majors are won by sub-30th players.

READ
Cooperstown Confidential

The Hall of Fame: baseball's Olympus, right? Yes, says Zev Chafets, in that the Greek gods were flawed too. Chafets exposes the hypocrisy of the Hall's character clause, arguing that the shrine is full of criminals and cheaters. Bonds and McGwire will love his plan: Change the selection process and have MLB legalize steroids.

WATCH
Track and field
worlds The

globe's best will be in Berlin starting on Aug. 15 (NBC and Versus). Rivals Usain Bolt and Tyson Gay will run in the 100 and 200 meters. Another cool moment: Jesse Owens will be honored at Olympic Stadium, where he made history in 1936. His granddaughter will present the long jump medals.

PLAY
Madden NFL 10
Q.K., kids, you've

had enough outdoor time this summer—now get back inside and fire up the gaming console! This year's version of *Madden* (for PlayStation, Xbox and Wii) drops on Friday, with Super Bowl combatants Larry Fitzgerald and Troy Polamalu on the cover. Take note, fantasy players: The *Madden* curse is real.

WATCH
Real Sports
HBO's mag

show, hosted by Bryant Gumbel, airs on Aug. 18 with an exclusive interview with Nick Schuyler, the sole survivor of the February boating accident that killed NFL players Marquis Cooper and Corey Smith. Schuyler, a former college defensive tackle, recounts the ordeal in harrowing detail.

Jeremy Piven

The *Entourage* star
is in *The Goods:
Live Hard, Sell Hard*,
in theaters Friday



I'm very much tied into the Chicago sports scene. As a huge Cubs fan, I love going to Harry Caray's. It's one of the greatest places to go and chill, have an amazing dinner and watch every sport you want. I'm excited about a new Harry Caray's restaurant that's going to be on the North Pier. Also, I love the idea that the spirit of Harry Caray lives on. He's one of those guys who was kind of a maverick; I don't know if he could exist in the media today. He was exactly who he was—a loose cannon—and I like being a part of something that carries on his legacy.

This legacy.
—As told to
Sarah Kwak

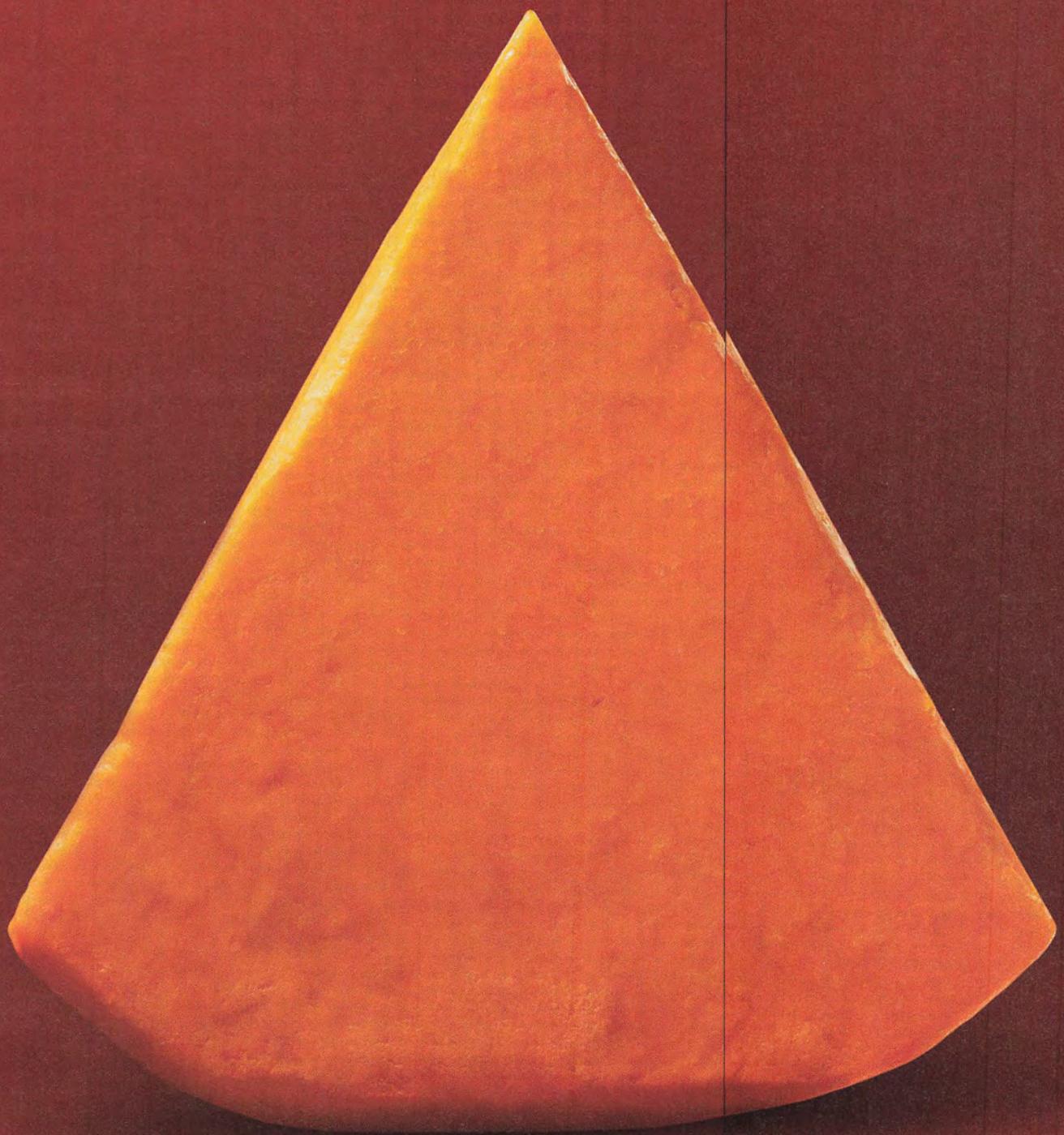
The Pop Culture Grid

Athletes in the mix	Jennifer Aniston should date ...	Favorite childhood possession	Don't mess with me when I'm ...	Song playing on my iPod right now	Eminem and Mariah Carey should ...
EBONY HOFFMAN Fever F	Her ex, Brad Pitt	My basketball	Hungry	Ego by Beyoncé	Have a conference
CLAYTON KERSHAW Dodgers P	Dane Cook	A ski cap with a ball on top	Playing Ping-Pong	Anything by Taylor Swift	Let each other alone
TANISHA WRIGHT Storm G	Matthew McConaughey	Punk Brewster sneakers	Sleepy	Bullet and Target by Citizen Cope	Grow up
ALAN GORDON Galaxy F	Ross (David Schwimmer)	Fly collection	Dropping off the kids at the pool	All I Need by Radiohead	Hug it out



Inside the Grid

Eminem's July release of the single *The Warning* is the latest taunt in his eight-year feud with Carey. In response to Carey's *Obsessed* video, in which she mocked the rapper, Eminem (above) brags about having an affair with the pop diva. Said Hoffman, "They need some kind of counseling to hash things out."



A Viking warrior with a long beard and a horned helmet is sitting on a green park bench. He is wearing a fur-trimmed tunic and breeches, and large fur boots. He is looking down at a silver laptop computer he is holding in his lap. The background shows a grassy park area.

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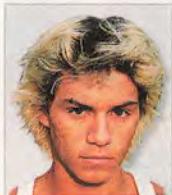
CITIZEN SPORTS

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Scorecard

Faces in the Crowd



Tyree Bastidas

BROOKLYN > Handball

Bastidas, a freshman at Kingsborough Community College, was the boys' 19-and-under singles champion at the U.S. Handball Association's National Three-Wall Juniors competition, his seventh singles title in his last seven tournaments. He also won the division doubles title, with Ricky Ortiz, and recently won the National One-Wall juniors event.



Stephanie Hudson

WINNETKA, ILL. > Sailing

Hudson, a freshman at Boston College, won the Club 420 boat division with teammate Rebecca King at the U.S. Youth Sailing Championships. Earlier this year Hudson was named one of six junior all-stars by *Sailing World* and was the top U.S. finisher (16th), along with King, in the 470 class at the junior women's world championships in Greece.

HIGH SCHOOL VIDEO FACE

Gunnar Nixon

EDMOND, OKLA. > Track and Field



Gunnar, a junior at Santa Fe High, won intermediate-division titles in the decathlon and the 400 hurdles (53.95 seconds) at the USA Track & Field National Junior Olympics. At the USA Youth Track & Field Championships, he won the decathlon, 110 hurdles (14.79) and high jump (6' 6 1/4").

► TO SEE GUNNAR'S VIDEO, GO TO Takkle.com/videofaces



Marielle Hall

MOUNT LAUREL, N.J. > Track and Field

Marielle, a senior at Haddonfield Memorial High, won the young women's division titles in the 3,000 meters (9:56.10) and the 1,500 (4:33.62) at the USA Track & Field National Junior Olympics. In the spring she was the New Jersey Group 2 champion in the 1,600 meters and the 800, setting a state meet group record in both races.



Joey Flattery

FORT DODGE, IOWA > Baseball

Joey, a senior at St. Edmond High, went 2-0 with 17 strikeouts in three games of the Iowa Class 2A tournament, helping the Gaels win their first state championship. He also had four hits and two RBIs in the title game. In the regular season Joey had a 9-0 record, an 0.98 ERA and 116 strikeouts. He will play for Iowa Central Community College.



Diana Finkel

SOUTH FORK, COLO. > Ultrarunning

Finkel, a 37-year-old teacher, won the Hardrock Hundred, a 100-mile endurance run through the San Juan Mountains, for the second year in a row. She covered the course, which has an average elevation of 11,000 feet and 66,000 feet of elevation gain and descent, in 27 hours, 18 minutes, beating the previous record by more than two hours.

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NICK SCHUYLER

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TIM LEWIS

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TUESDAY, AUG. 18
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Scorecard



Just My Type

By Dan Patrick

The Interview

Brian Urlacher BEARS LINEBACKER

Chicago's man in the middle is in camp preparing for his 10th NFL season. He addressed rumors about his relationship with new QB Jay Cutler

Dan Patrick: Are you and Jay Cutler getting along?

Brian Urlacher: I've heard that question about 5,000 times.

DP: Let's get it out of the way. How did this become a story?

BU: Because [Vikings wideout] Bobby Wade said [Urlacher thinks Cutler is a "p---"]]. I think he was just trying to get something stirred up, and it obviously worked because our media went crazy. All of a sudden [Cutler and I were supposedly] getting in fights in the locker room and nightclubs. I don't know where all that came from.

DP: Any truth to any of this?

BU: None of it. We've gotten along since Day One.

DP: Now are you circling the date when you face the Vikings and Bobby Wade?

BU: Those dates are already circled, man. They won the division last year.

DP: Is Devin Hester going to be an every-down wide receiver or is he still sort of a specialty act?

BU: I think he's going to focus on catching balls and not returning kicks.

DP: When you face Matthew Stafford with the Lions, what can you do that will affect how he'll play?

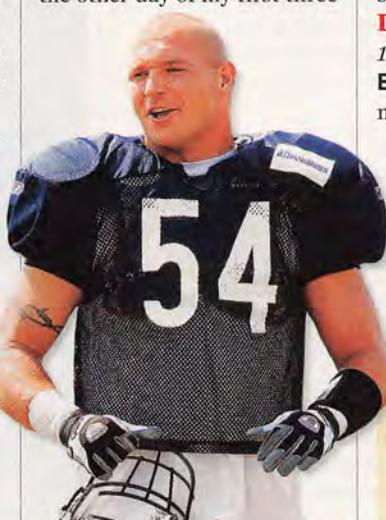
BU: He's going to have a hard enough time just being a rookie. I don't have to say too much. And being in the situation he's in, going to that team. . . . I don't know how high the expectations are, but I'm sure they're higher than they were last year.

DP: But you want him to start, don't you?

BU: We like it when a rookie quarterback starts, unless it's Matt Ryan.

DP: When you look back on your first or second year with the Bears, what do you see?

BU: Just a young guy running around. I was watching some film the other day of my first three



seasons. I thought I was decent back then, but I just ran around the whole game. That's the difference now. I didn't [stay in] a gap. I just ran to the football. I made a bunch of plays doing that. Maybe I should just say "screw my job" and run to the football.

DP: What do you think of teams that fight during training camp? Good for the team?

BU: It's great, man. Practices drag on during camp, but if you get that fight early, then everybody's on edge the rest of the day. We had two or three the other day. The worst part about it is that Coach [Lovie] Smith makes you stay after you fight. So you're already tired as heck, and then he makes you stay.

DP: What's it like when [Minnesota running back Adrian] Peterson gets the ball?

BU: He tests you. He'll bounce around so much back there, and then once he sees a crease he hits it. You've got to be very gap controlled with him; no matter what you think he's doing, just run through your gap. He's probably going to cut back to you.

DP: Is there anybody like him in the NFL?

BU: No, there's no one as explosive as him. He does some things I haven't seen before. He's definitely the best offensive player in the game.

DP: Can I pencil you in for 10 wins?

BU: I think so. I'd like to say more, but 10 is a good starting point. Talentwise, we're up there with anybody.

DP: So I'll pencil you in for the NFC title game, O.K.?

BU: That'd be great too.

DP: Pen or pencil?

BU: You should use a pen.

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1. Bob Stoops discusses the Sooners' national title chances.

2. Mike Tyson talks about *Tyson*, the documentary about his life.



National Dilemma

After Prince Fielder's tirade last week against Dodgers reliever Guillermo Mota, who threw at the Brewers' slugger (above) in retaliation for L.A.'s Manny Ramirez and Juan Pierre being hit earlier in the game, MLB Network analyst Al Leiter said it takes some serious guts for National League pitchers to protect a teammate. "There's definitely a fear factor if you know you've got to stand in the [batter's] box," said Leiter, a lefthander who pitched in the AL and NL during his 19-year career. "If I knock you down and walk around with my chest puffed, and I know I have to bat every three innings . . . I don't want to take Guillermo Mota's [95-mph fastball] in my back."

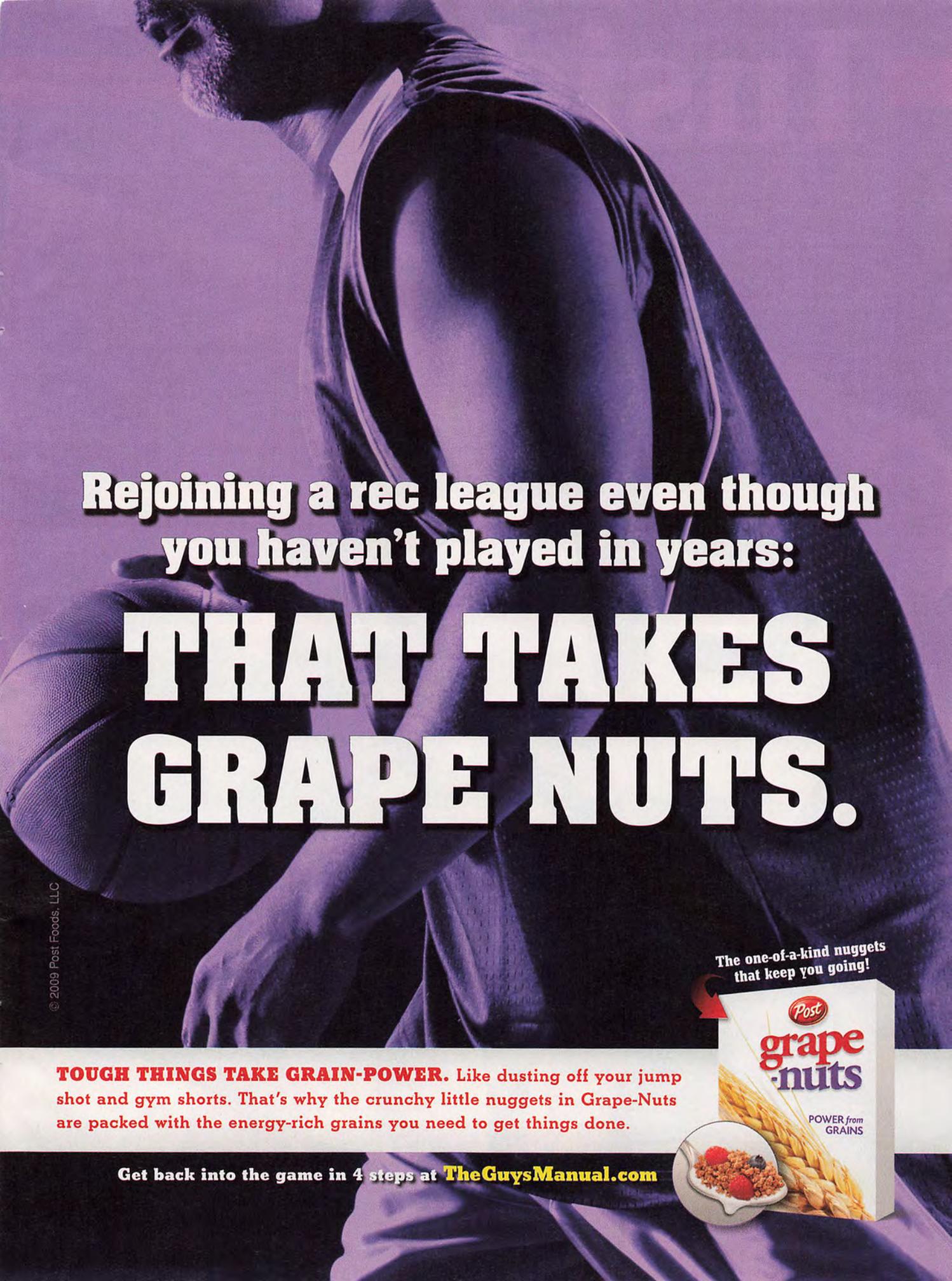
Line of the week



Retired NBA executive and Hall of Famer Jerry West

talked about the Lakers signing forward Ron Artest, who will replace departed free agent Trevor Ariza: "Will [Artest] fit into what they're doing? Trevor Ariza was a nice fit for them. Ariza's not as talented as Artest, but sometimes talent gets in the way of people being able to play well together."

THE FINE PRINT: Eli Manning will sign a \$97 million extension. But half of that is insurance that he won't do commercials.



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THE WEEK IN SPORTS

Inside

DOG DAYS

Pedroia looked steamed, but the Sox offense remained cold in a weekend rout at the hands of Rodriguez (inset) and the Yankees.

Photographs by
DAMIAN STROHMEYER



Baseball

Not Dead, But . . .

The Red Sox have been knocked around by winning teams since late June; now it's time to make a coldhearted call | BY JOE SHEEHAN

When the Red Sox obtained Victor Martinez from the Indians on July 31, it appeared to create a good kind of logjam on the roster: too many quality hitters for too few lineup spots. For a team that had scored a mediocre 4.2 runs per game in the two weeks leading up to the trade deadline, Martinez came at just the right time, and his five-hit performance in an

18-run outburst against the Orioles on Aug. 2 seemed to be immediate confirmation that he was the final piece of the Sox puzzle for 2009.

Then the Sox left Baltimore, and the euphoria quickly faded. In their next six games—all losses to the Rays and the Yankees—the Sox scored just 14 runs, a stretch that included a 15-inning shutout last Friday night in New York, which ended on a walk-off two-run homer by Alex Rodriguez. Up by three games in the AL East on July 17, the Sox were $6\frac{1}{2}$ games out of first at week's end. In that $3\frac{1}{2}$ -week stretch all but one of their wins came over the woeful Orioles and Athletics. In fact, dating to June 27, Boston had just one win, in 13 tries, over an above-.500 team.

The blame for this stretch falls squarely on the once-formidable offense, which has scored three runs or fewer in half of its games since July 18. Last week Sox pitchers held the Rays to two runs in 12 innings and the Yankees to zero in 14, only to be let down by the lineup and eventually lose both games. The Red Sox bullpen has been solid since the All-Star



break, with the top seven relievers combining to allow just 19 earned runs in $63\frac{2}{3}$ innings.

The performance of Boston's up-the-middle players has especially hamstrung the club this season. Second baseman Dustin

Pedroia is having a fine year, though it's down a notch from his MVP season in 2008. Nick Green, Jed Lowrie and the since-traded Julio Lugo, however, have combined for some of the worst shortstop play in the majors: poor at the plate and, in Green's case, mistake-prone in the field. Centerfielder Jacoby Ellsbury steals bases at a high rate of success (50 in 58 attempts), but with a .348 on-base percentage and just 27 unintentional walks, he's still a work in progress as a leadoff batter.

The lineup logjam was temporarily eased last weekend in their showdown with the Yankees because leftfielder Jason Bay, their second-best player this season, sat out the first three games with a hamstring strain. But that forced Kevin Youkilis, their best player and a solid infielder, to play left, where he looked unsure of

THE NUMBERS The AL Cy Guy

No starter has won the AL Cy Young Award with fewer than 18 victories in a full season. That could change this year, as the Royals' **Zack Greinke** has been the best pitcher in the league yet has just 11 wins with probably 11 starts left. Greinke leads the AL in ERA, is tied for first in complete games and shutouts, and is second in strikeouts. He has done the job a starting pitcher gets paid to do—prevent the other team from scoring over as many innings as you can—better than any AL hurler has. His low win total reflects the awful team around him. According to the sabermetric stat support-neutral value, which equalizes run and bullpen support, he should have six more wins. Playing for the Royals should not be held against him at awards time. —J.S.



Inside | Baseball

himself. The intermittent availability of third baseman Mike Lowell due to chronic hip problems has created playing time as well, and catcher Jason Varitek's midseason fade—through Sunday he had hit .153 with no homers since the All-Star break—had made it easier to occasionally sit the captain. When everyone who can play the infield and outfield corners, DH and catcher is available, it's clear that Martinez, Bay, Youkilis and J.D. Drew should play nearly every day, and that Lowell, Varitek and David Ortiz should share the remaining at bats in the other two lineup spots.

The last of those names is the elephant in the room. Even before the recent revelation that he is on a list of players who allegedly tested positive for a banned substance in 2003, the Sox star was having

a difficult year. His .219 batting average, .308 on-base percentage and .408 slugging percentage—which projects to be the worst full season of his career—would be inadequate for a middle infielder, but they're absolutely crippling from a designated hitter. His brief hot stretch in June has been long forgotten; Ortiz has just a .208/.271/.377 line since the All-Star break.

Ortiz brings negative base-running value, and batting him in the middle of the lineup is just providing an escape hatch for opposing pitchers. In a 13–6 loss to the Yankees last Thursday, Ortiz failed with two runners on in the first, third and fifth innings, hitting into a particularly damaging double play in his second at bat.

The only qualification to be a DH is to hit, and Ortiz



THE TIME HAS COME
With Boston's excess of bats, benching Big Papi is the club's most logical choice.

sition, at first. Kotchman (.277/.350/.410) has outhit Ortiz this season and plays excellent defense.

The Red Sox, who looked to be on cruise control as recently as three weeks ago, are now in a full-fledged fight for the wild-card spot, tied with the surging Rangers and a half-game ahead of the Rays at week's end. The Sox can no longer afford to experiment with various alignments or wait for Big Papi to come around. As the decision to designate 42-year-old righthander John Smoltz for assignment last week shows, this is no time for sentiment. With the additions of Martinez and Kotchman, Ortiz is no longer qualified to be in the Red Sox lineup. □

doesn't seem to be able to do that any longer. Any way you look at the Sox talent, Ortiz appears to be the odd man out. Even if Lowell cannot play on a given day, the Sox are better off with Youkilis at third, Martinez at DH and Casey Kotchman, another deadline acqui-

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Nearly killed in his first big-league at bat, a comeback kid tells of it at SI.com/bonus

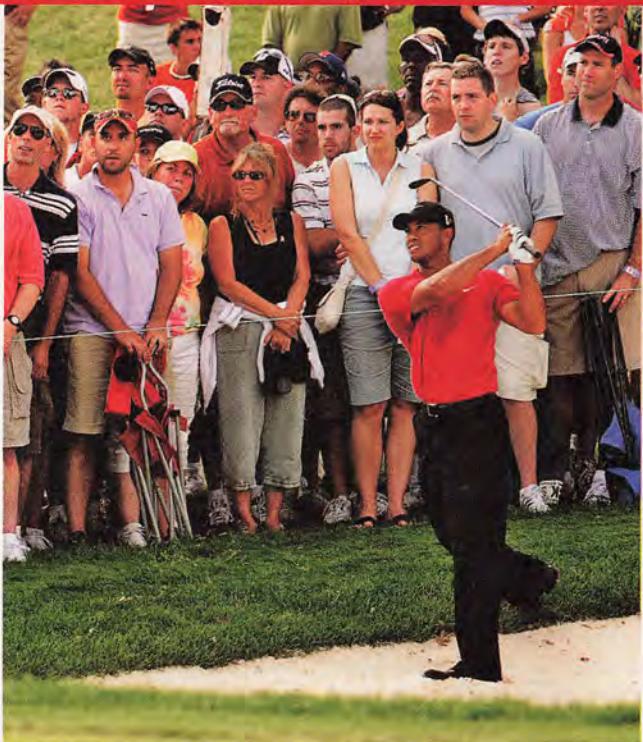
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WHAT DOES A MITCHUM MAN SAY TO SAVING MONEY? "CHEERS," OF COURSE.





Inside | Golf



Big Finish

With two consecutive wins before 2009's final major, Tiger Woods is making his comeback season special | BY GARY VAN SICKLE

The fan, perched on a landing halfway up the outdoor staircase that led to the clubhouse at Firestone Country Club, shouted out as Tiger Woods, the seven-time winner of the World Golf Championships-Bridgestone Invitational, was being escorted to the awards ceremony on Sunday. "Hey, Tiger! Nice weekend!" yelled the man, who held a beer in one hand and a cigar in the other. Woods looked over and, without breaking stride, wordlessly responded with a small wave.

Some things change. Woods usually tunes out such salutations, having learned to live with his own kind of tunnel vision, a necessary skill when you're arguably the most famous athlete in the world. But Tiger is in a good place this summer. Being the father of two will do that, and so will winning, which he has done five times so far in 2009.

And some things don't change.

Because of his disappointing play in the first three majors this year—he tied for sixth in the Masters and the U.S. Open, and missed the cut at the British Open—the debate rages over whether Woods is fully recovered from surgery on his left knee, and whether his coach, Hank Haney, has helped or hurt Woods's game, particularly his in-and-out play off the tee.

Those who say Woods is driving the ball poorly must've been mystified last weekend when, on some of the narrowest fairways on the PGA Tour, he shot a pair of five-under 65s, hitting 64%

PIGGY BANK
Woods has won 16 of the first 32 World Golf Championships, good for almost \$19 million.

and 57% of the fairways, respectively. Says Hunter Mahan, who tied for fourth, "He would do well here playing lefthanded."

Those who ask whether Woods is "back" might be interested to learn that, in fact, he is closing in on one of his best seasons. The Bridgestone victory was his second in a row and fourth in his last six starts. If he should win his 15th major at this week's PGA Championship at Hazeltine National Golf Club in Chaska, Minn., plus a couple of FedEx Cup playoff events to end the season, he could finish this comeback year with eight, maybe nine wins. In his best year, 2000, Woods won nine times.

The Bridgestone win, by four strokes over Robert Allenby and Padraig Harrington, with a 12-under 268, bodes well for Woods this week. First, Firestone is a major-worthy course that is similar to Hazeltine—same grasses and trees, and the greens are relatively the same size and speed. Second, Woods has won the PGA four times, but never in a year in which he hadn't also won at Firestone. And finally, Tiger clearly has his groove back. Everyone could see that during the third round, when he jumped from 13th place to the final pairing on Sunday with Harrington. For perhaps the first time this season Woods was in complete control of his game. He picked his lines, hit his spots and needed only 23 putts.

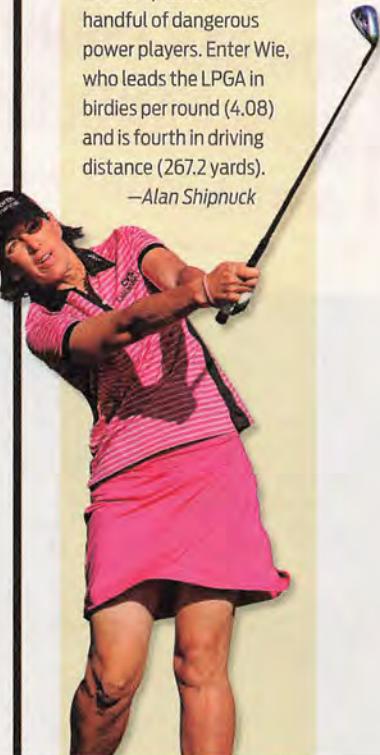
Tiger was still on his game on Sunday, reeling off an eagle and three birdies on the front side to erase Harrington's three-shot lead and go in front by two. Then a couple of errant drives led to a pair of bogeys,

SHORT GAME

Perfect Pair

Beth Daniel's captain's picks—49-year-old Juli Inkster (*below*) and 19-year-old Michelle Wie—will be crucial to the U.S.'s bid to retain the Solheim Cup next week. Inkster has had an uneven season, but she instantly becomes the team leader on a callow squad, with three rookies and an average age of 25.6 (excluding Inkster, who has a daughter Wie's age). Inkster's 14-8-5 record is one of the best in Solheim history, and she radiates the kind of intensity that a team can rally around. The U.S. is considered the favorite because of its depth, but the Europeans boast a handful of dangerous power players. Enter Wie, who leads the LPGA in birdies per round (4.08) and is fourth in driving distance (267.2 yards).

—Alan Shipnuck



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Inside | Golf

and the game was on. The tournament was decided at the 16th hole, a downhill par-5 of 667 yards with a small green guarded by a pond. Woods drove into the left rough and chipped out. Harrington drove into the right rough but pulled his second across the fairway and into the left rough on an upslope. From 178 yards out, Woods then landed a sweet eight-iron shot four feet past the cup and watched it spin back to within inches for a kick-in birdie. "That was a phenomenal shot," Harrington said. "I struggled to hit [and hold] that green with a lob wedge, so it was pretty impressive."

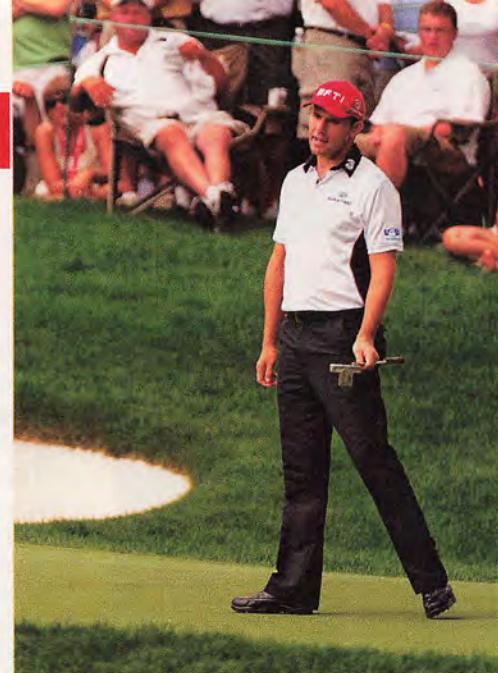
In fact, Harrington missed the green long and right with his third shot on Sunday, his ball coming to rest in a patch of thick rough. Facing a downhill pitch with little green to work with and water just be-

yond, but knowing that Woods had a guaranteed birdie, Harrington tried a risky flop shot, caught his ball heavy and knocked it into the drink. He wound up with an embarrassing triple-bogey 8.

Later, Woods blamed a rules official for upsetting Harrington on the 16th tee. The official, John Paramor, chief referee for the European tour, told the players that they were "on the clock" because they had lagged behind the pace of play. Woods said he thought it caused Harrington to rush his crucial third and fourth shots. (Harrington blamed himself for not executing them.) Woods, when asked if he had won because he hit a great eight-iron at 16 or because

Harrington was rattled after being put on the clock, simply said, "Both."

The victory was Tiger's 70th on the PGA Tour, leaving him three behind Jack Nicklaus for second place on the alltime list. (Sam Snead holds the Tour record with 82 wins.) If you mix in Woods's 11 international vic-



PADDY WHACKED
Rattled by a slow-play warning, Harrington made a disastrous snowman on the 16th hole.

tories, his 13 unofficial titles (such as his seven wins at the PGA Grand Slam of Golf) and his six U.S. Golf Association championships (three U.S. Amateurs and U.S. Juniors), the Bridgestone victory was Woods's 100th.

After Sunday's fireworks, Harrington

shook hands with Woods on the 18th green and said, "We'll do battle many times again." And soon. Harrington and Woods are to play in the same threesome (along with Rich Beem) for the first two rounds of the PGA Championship. After that, all we can hope for is another nice weekend. □

FRED VUICH



Cruise Control

With four races left to make the Chase, the fiercely competitive Kyle Busch needs to focus on points, not wins | BY MARK BEECH

Kyle Busch makes no secret of the fact that he's happy only when he's winning. But it's hard to believe that his fourth-place finish in Monday's Sprint Cup race at Watkins Glen, N.Y., didn't raise his spirits at least a little. The Shrub, who won three of the first 10 races in 2009, had been in a dismal slump—only two top 10 finishes in 10 starts—entering last weekend. Now with only four races left in the regular season, Busch is 13th in the points standings, 58 short of the 12th and final Chase spot. There's no reason to panic. Not yet, anyway.

Busch's stormy temperament has factored into his disappointing summer. When missing spring rubbers created handling problems that led to a 33rd-place finish at Chicago last month, he essentially threw in the towel midrace, responding to crew chief Steve Addington's radioed questions about the car's performance with comments like, "I don't care what you do. It's a piece of junk."

Busch has since vowed again—to try to control his anger, but that promise seemed empty after his qualifying lap at the Glen last Friday. His time was good enough for the eighth spot on the grid, but his bobble

in the tricky bus-stop turn cost him, and he was fuming as he climbed from his car. He threw the steering wheel into the cockpit, snatched a cap from the hand of his p.r. rep and let fly with an expletive at the prospect of doing more than one post-qualifying interview.

"He puts so much pressure on himself," says Addington. "You lose a lot more than you win in racing, and you've got to have a driver who can turn that switch off."

Recently Busch has been on the defensive about his choice to run a full Nationwide schedule this year. He is rolling to the title in that series, leading it with six wins and riding a record run of 10 straight first- or second-place finishes, but that success seems to have come at the expense of his efforts in Cup. Busch scoffs at the notion that his Nationwide campaign is distracting and wearing on



TURNING POINT?

A fourth at the Glen moved Busch (inset) closer to the Chase, but he has no margin for error—or loss of temper.

him, and while the dual-series grind is not for every driver—"I

don't have enough patience to do both," says reigning Cup champion Jimmie Johnson—it's hard to argue with him. "I don't think it would be worth giving up a Nationwide championship just to walk yourself into the Chase," says Busch.

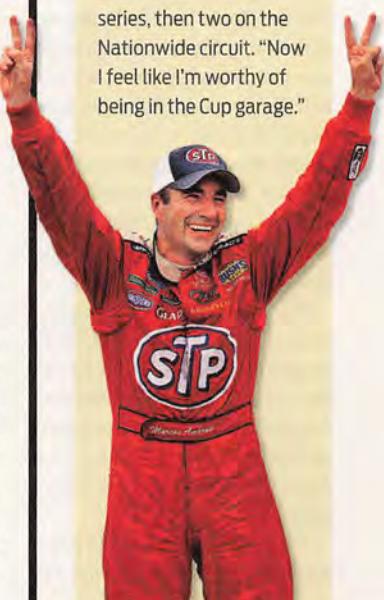
A bigger factor in his recent struggles is that the number 18 Toyota simply isn't as competitive as it was earlier in the season. Busch has led more laps in the Cup series this year (824) than every other driver but Jimmie Johnson (995), yet only 35 of those have come since his sixth-place run at Charlotte on May 25. NASCAR's ban on in-season testing has made it difficult for Addington to experiment with setups, and the team's also up against the symbiotic relationship between Hendrick Motorsports and Stewart-Haas Racing, which share performance data among their total of six teams—and combined have won seven of the last 10 races. At Joe Gibbs Racing, Busch gets information only from teammates Denny Hamlin (fifth in points after Monday's 10th-place finish) and rookie Joey Logano (19th).

With a spot in the Chase on the line, Busch will be under pressure over the next four weeks to race for points rather than victories, something he is normally loath to do. But there's one thing he dreads even more than points racing: "If you don't make the Chase," he says, "then ultimately you've run the rest of the year for nothing." □

SHORT TRACK Aussie Rules

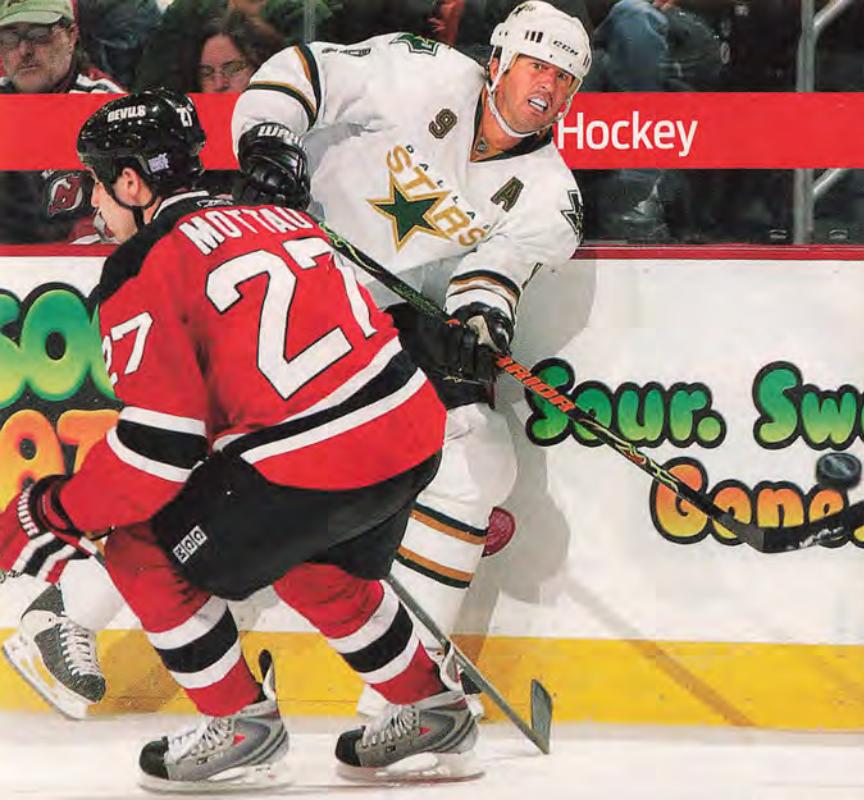
Marcos Ambrose

shot to prominence at Watkins Glen last season when he won the Nationwide event and took third in the Cup race (just his third career series start). This year Ambrose (below) came even closer to the sweep, repeating as the Nationwide victor last Saturday, then finishing second to Tony Stewart in the rain-delayed Cup race on Monday. The 32-year-old Australian, a former open-wheel driver, has six top 10 finishes in his first full Cup season, at the wheel of the number 47 JTG Daugherty Racing Toyota. "This time last year I was very intimidated," says Ambrose, who spent a season in the Truck series, then two on the Nationwide circuit. "Now I feel like I'm worthy of being in the Cup garage."



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Hockey

One Mo Time

As Team USA opens its Olympic training camp, is throwback Mike Modano still the man to lead? | BY SARAH KWAK

On a young Team USA roster, Stars center Mike Modano sticks out not only for his 1970 birth date—he's five years older than Jamie Langenbrunner, the next eldest forward—but also because he's a throwback to what the team used to be. As the Olympic orientation camp opens next week in Woodridge, Ill., the 34 invitees represent a tremendous turnover. Twenty-two players, including the Blues' Erik Johnson and the Ducks' Bobby Ryan, are in their first Olympic camp, while stars such as Penguins winger Bill Guerin and Blues winger Keith Tkachuk, were left off the list for the first time since taking the U.S. to its last tournament victory, in the 1996 World Cup of Hockey. From that gold medal team only Modano remains.

"At some point the changing of the guard is inevitable," U.S. general manager Brian Burke says, "but the guy who has performed at the highest level consistently is Mike Modano, to a degree that those [other older] guys have not matched."

Yet Modano, whose 543 NHL goals and 1,329 points are re-

cords for a U.S.-born player, is not a lock to make the final 23-man team. With fewer than 60 points in each of the past three NHL seasons, Modano isn't the offensive threat that he was when, for example, he had six assists in six games while helping Team USA win a silver medal at the 2002 Games in Salt Lake City. He has, however, embraced a more defensive role with Dallas while working hard to help younger players develop, qualities that resonated with Burke and the Olympic team selection committee.

"His production has fallen off, but his usefulness as a player has not," Burke says. "The metamorphosis you want to see in an older

LABOR OF LOVE

Modano's scoring is down, but his disciplined work ethic could inspire teammates, as it has in Dallas.

player has already taken place with Modo. Now the question is: Are there guys better in that [third-line] role than he is? As much as I respect Mike Modano, we'll go with the group that we think gives us the best chance to win."

The callowness of Team USA may suit Modano, who has become accustomed to being surrounded by youth. Last season he often shared the ice with 21-year-old James Neal, whose 24 goals ranked second among NHL rookies, and 24-year-old Fabian Brunnstrom. Modano, who consistently arrives early and prepares assiduously for games, was the first Star back on the team's ice this summer, and it is he who organizes the players-only skates before training camp begins.

The Olympic selection process hardly ends after the three-day camp (final rosters aren't set until late December, well before the start of the Games), and proving that he deserves a spot on the team, Modano says, will motivate him in the early months of the season. If it weren't for the lure of Vancouver 2010, he might not have returned for his 20th year in the NHL. "To be thought of [as a potential Olympian] is humbling, and you don't want to disappoint them," Modano says of the team selectors. "My hope is to make it a little difficult for them [to exclude me] come February." □

PIERRE MCGUIRE'S In the Crease

The retirement of Sabres defenseman **Teppo Numminen**, as well as Buffalo's loss of **Jaroslav Spacek** to free agency, opens the door for **Tyler Myers** (below), a 6' 7"

defenseman whom the Sabres drafted 12th overall in 2008. Myers, who spent last season in the WHL, skates well, has excellent hockey instincts and was the best defenseman at Canada's world juniors camp in Saskatoon last week. He could be an impact player in Buffalo this season....

The Ducks' signing of **Saku Koivu** remains the NHL off-season's most underappreciated move. Koivu is a solid second liner to insulate top center **Ryan Getzlaf**, and he's a pure winner. Koivu and fellow Finn **Teemu Selanne** will make sweet things happen as Anaheim linemates.



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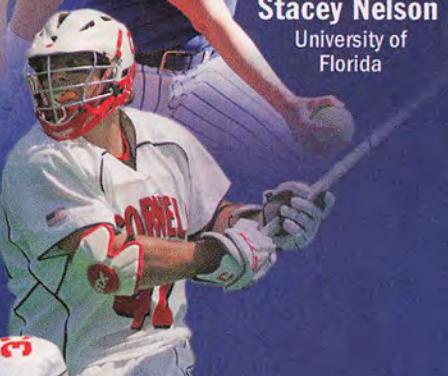
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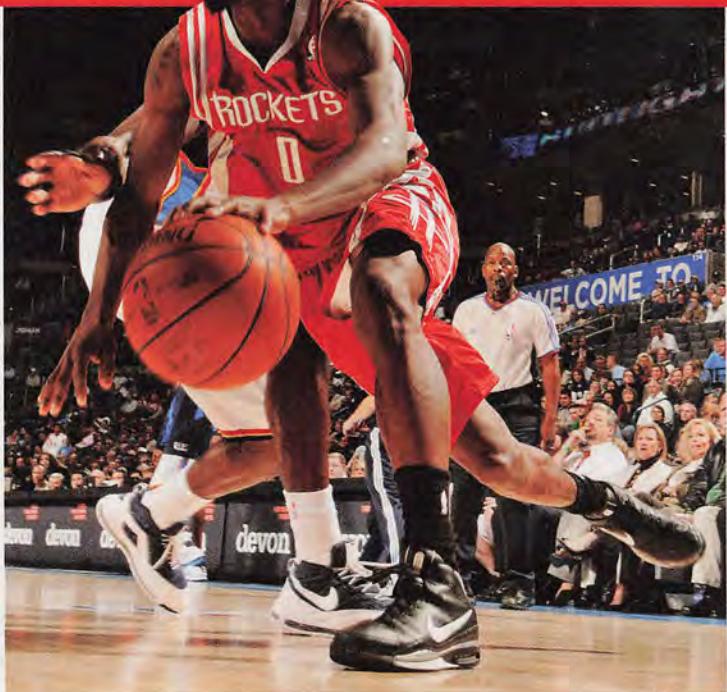


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Rockets' Science

Injuries and departures have taken their toll on a contender. Can Houston come up with a formula for success? | BY CHRIS MANNIX

The Rockets still have a skilled international center manning the middle. Only it's David Andersen, an Australian, and not Yao Ming, who will miss the entire 2009–10 season after undergoing surgery last month to reshape a bone in his left foot. They still have a defensive maven at small forward. Only instead of the recently departed Ron Artest it's former Laker Trevor Ariza, who signed a five-year, \$33 million free-agent contract. And they still have a potentially explosive scorer in the backcourt. Only it's not Tracy McGrady but rookie Jermaine Taylor, who averaged 26.2 points for Central Florida last season and will fill in while McGrady recovers from microfracture knee surgery. In other words Houston is now a pale imitation of the team that took the Lakers to seven games in the Western Conference semifinals. "When the previews come out, we'll probably be in the back of the magazines, under the cologne ads," says general manager Daryl Morey. "But we're not going to feel sorry for ourselves."

Primarily a half-court club

since drafting Yao in 2002, the Rockets will pin their hopes on an up-tempo attack that was surprisingly effective in the second half of last season. Running it will be Aaron Brooks, the third-year blur of a point guard who became a starter when Rafer Alston was traded to the Magic in February. Brooks was a revelation, particularly in the postseason, when he averaged 16.8 points and 3.4 assists. But after playing off Yao, Artest and McGrady last season, he will have to adjust to being Houston's primary weapon. "He can get by anybody," says a Western Conference scout. "But if he doesn't establish himself as an outside threat, teams will

LONE STAR
The fleet Brooks provided a boost in the playoffs but will draw more attention with the team's stars out.

defend him like they did Tony Parker early in his career and back off."

In Andersen, 29, a 2002 second-round pick who has played in Europe since 1999, the Rockets think they've found a round-peg, round-hole fit for coach Rick Adelman. In his read-and-react system the center directs the action from the high post, a role in which Yao sometimes struggled. The 6' 11" Andersen—who averaged 11.1 points and 4.1 rebounds for FC Barcelona last season—is an adept passer with an accurate 18-foot jumper. Says Morey, "He's the quintessential elbow big man."

And more help could be on the way. While the Rockets may clear as much as \$15 million in cap space after next season, Morey says they will be "very active" in the trade market during '09–10. Houston has a coveted trading chip in McGrady, whose \$22.5 million expiring contract makes him valuable even if he only plays half a season. "They'll be able to make a blockbuster deal," says an Eastern Conference G.M., "because a lot of teams will want to wipe that salary off their books after next year."

If Morey can trade for an All-Star, he believes the Rockets will be poised to make a title run in 2010–11, when Yao returns. "We're not naive; we know we need Yao to be a contender," says Morey. "But NBA titles are won by teams with elite talent and good role players. We feel as if we already have some very good young talent." □

FAST BREAK Test Pattern

The news that Magic forward Rashard Lewis tested positive for elevated levels of testosterone may have linked the NBA to the steroid scandal that has plagued baseball, but don't expect a similar slew of doping violations. Since 1999 the NBA has randomly tested players four times per season for banned substances, and only six players have been suspended. League sources say Lewis, who tested positive for DHEA, a testosterone booster found in supplements, mixed an over-the-counter powder into a protein shake but didn't verify what was in it. The mistake will cost him 10 games (and \$1.6 million), but it's probably not an indicator of widespread steroid use in the league.



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NFL

Why We Fight

For new Jets coach Rex Ryan, nothing builds team unity like a good old-fashioned training camp brawl | BY PETER KING

On the campus of the State University of New York at Cortland, 215 miles northwest of Manhattan, rookie Jets coach Rex Ryan has exactly what he wants in a training camp—privacy, mostly, and the ability to mold his team in his likeness. That includes fighting. The f word. Some coaches abhor the training-camp fights that inevitably erupt during the long, hot practices of summer. Tony

Dungy would tell his teams in Tampa and Indianapolis that fighting during practice would help a prospect earn a ticket out of town. San Francisco coach Mike Singletary forced his entire squad to run punitive wind sprints after one practice last week because tight end Vernon Davis broke Singletary's no-fighting rule, mixing it up with linebacker Marques Harris. The Giants had a 20-player brawl on Saturday night, forcing coach Tom Coughlin to stop practice and scream at his players. Coughlin's mantra: Chipperness is fine, but fighting only creates hard feelings.

Ryan is different. One day last week during a full-pad, full-speed contact drill, Jets running back Thomas Jones collided with safety James Ihedigbo, whose forearm came up into Jones's

chest. Jones started swinging, and within seconds 40 players were jousting. Nearby, Ryan looking on, grinning.

When he took over the Jets last winter, Ryan watched tape from 2008 and saw at least two instances when in his eyes opponents went over the line physically and Jets teammates didn't defend their mates. It made his blood boil. So when New York opened camp late last month, Ryan told his players the rules of engagement: If and when there is a fight, offensive players should pull defensive players off the pile and vice versa; never should an offensive player grab another during a fight, because that could give a defender a chance to get a free shot in when his foe was being held. Units needed to develop pride, Ryan preached. The team wouldn't come to-

gether until the offense was one and the defense was one. Players didn't need to fight to make that happen, but if they did, they should do

GANG-UP GREEN

When a scuffle broke out at Jets camp last week, players followed the how-to rules Ryan had laid out earlier.

KING'S CORNER

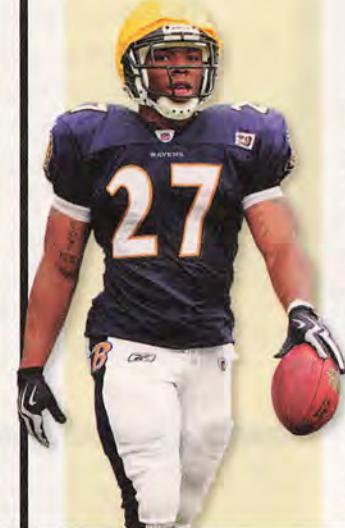
August Hits

Who has impressed me during the first two weeks of my camp tour?

1. Ray Rice. The Ravens RB (below) made the best play I've seen so far, a one-handed snare of a Joe Flacco fastball in the flat. Rice could pass incumbent Willis McGahee on the Baltimore depth chart.

2. Percy Harvin The Vikings are working hard to get the speedy first-round WR ready to be an impact player by opening day. Says corner Antoine Winfield, "If he gets even half a step on you, he'll beat any corner in the league."

3. Matt Cassel The Chiefs QB has been taking command of the offense the way he needs to while showing proper deference to his older teammates. He's also been very sharp throwing the ball.



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Inside | The NFL

"If this is how you go against your teammates, we're going to have that much more of an edge against our opponents."

That's Ryan's hope. The players like his from-the-gut approach—he spoke to the offense for 35 minutes on the first day of camp without notes. Ryan has toiled for 21 years as a college and pro assistant, and he's not going to hold anything back. "When he talked to us in that meeting," says wide receiver Jerricho Cotchery, "you could just feel his passion. I looked around the room, and it was like, 'We want to go out and practice right now.' We're juiced to play for this guy."

The Jets will need one of their quarterbacks—the winner of the Sanchez–Kellen Clemens camp battle—to play well to have a chance to upset the Patriots or the defending champ Dolphins in the AFC East. But as

Ryan said during the spring, they're not going to kiss Bill Belichick's Super Bowl rings. "I'll make this promise: We're going to be a team nobody wants to play," he said. Judging by the tape rolling on his video monitor last week, he'll keep that promise.

MANNING AND RIVERS

Paydays Coming

► Shortly after Giants quarterback Eli Manning agreed in principle last week to a six-year, \$97.5 million extension with \$35 million guaranteed, an NFL general manager was asked how the deal might affect Philip Rivers, Tom Brady, Peyton Manning and Drew Brees—star quarterbacks whose contracts expire between 2010 and '12. The reply: "Big-time renegotiations."



STRIKING GOLD

Eli's new deal could set off a ripple effect among his fellow quarterbacks.

next three seasons, remains eye-opening.

The ripple effect probably won't be seen immediately. Brady's deal expires after the 2010 season, but the Patriots likely will want to make sure he's fully recovered from reconstructive left-knee surgery before ponying up megamoney. And Brees and Peyton Manning have two years left on their pacts after this season, so there's no reason to rush.

That leaves Rivers, whose contract expires at the end of the 2009 season. He and Eli have been linked since they were the central figures in a blockbuster draft-day trade in '04, with the Chargers selecting Manning No. 1 overall and sending him

Much of the football community had been waiting for the Manning deal to reset the compensation bar for quarterbacks. The pact did not set a record for guaranteed money as many believed it would (rookie Matthew Stafford got \$41.7 million guaranteed from the Lions), but one agent of a top-tier quarterback says the Manning deal, whose structure all but assures him of earning \$49 million over the

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go on the road

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Tom Spencer is an editorial consultant for CBS Sports for the PGA Tour and NFL Football coverage.

go black & gold

As a Bay Area football fan, this is hard to admit, but Pittsburgh's pre-game atmosphere is tough to top. Pump up your own team by wearing their colors—subtly or boldly—on game days.



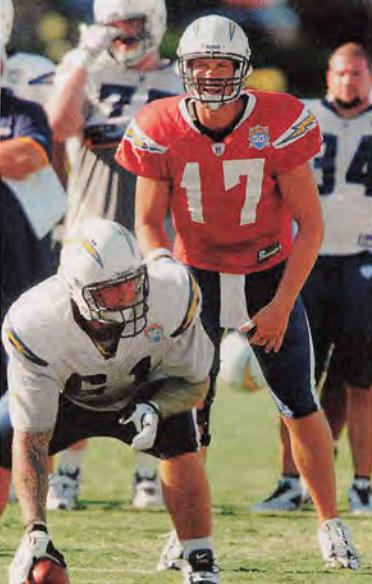
go scenic

St. Andrews, home to the 2010 Open Championship, is a favorite locale. There are some great books that provide an inside look at the course. For my suggestions, visit si.com/govisa.



to the Giants for Rivers (taken fourth overall) and three draft picks. Since then Manning has won a Super Bowl, and Rivers has taken San Diego to the playoffs in each of his three seasons as a starter. The Chargers' quarterback also is coming off a year in which he tied for the league lead with 34 touchdown passes and had an NFL-best 105.5 passer rating.

San Diego tried to open contract talks with Rivers last February, but agent Jimmy Sexton rebuffed the team while waiting for the Manning deal to be finalized. Sexton and Chargers management had a contentious negotiation in 2004, when Rivers missed 29 practices and two preseason games before agreeing to a six-year, \$40.5 million deal with \$18 million guaranteed, and this one could be just as intriguing.



Jackson, left tackle Marcus McNeill and running back Darren Sproles.

However, if—as expected—union and management fail to come to terms on a new collective bargaining agreement before March 2010, that season will be “uncapped,” and players will need six accrued seasons instead of four to reach unrestricted free agency. Merriman, Jackson, McNeill and Sproles each would have five or fewer, thus preventing them from hitting the open market without restrictions that favor the Chargers. Some league observers believe San Diego would benefit more than any other team if the owners and players fail to reach an agreement. “If I’m a team, that’s what I would want,” one agent said. “You’re going to piss off some guys, but that’s the business.”

KING PHILIP

Rivers's contract is up after this season, and San Diego is intent on keeping him.

Rivers is taking things in stride. After suffering a torn right ACL in January 2008, which required off-season surgery, he knows the end of his career could be a play away and wants to maximize his earnings. At the same time, he understands that the Chargers could have greater roster flexibility if he signs a new contract before '10, putting San Diego in position to use the franchise tag on someone else if a new CBA is reached.

“It’s way too early to feel that side of it,” Rivers said last week, when asked if there was an urgency to get a deal done before 2010. “If we were sitting here [in this position next February], then that’s a little different. But we’re not there.” Yet. —Jim Trotter

go wurst

The best game-day food is a tasty bratwurst at Green Bay's Lambeau Field. Recreate them for your next party by grilling up some beer-boiled brats and onions.



go to the field

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go aquatic

Boats are welcome in McCovey Cove in San Francisco, where fans wait for game balls to land in the Bay. Bring a waterproof radio to listen to the Giants play by play—and a swimsuit to dive for those splashing homers.



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USES

- NIASPAN® (niacin extended-release tablets) is a prescription medication used along with diet when a diet low in saturated fat and cholesterol and other non-drug measures alone have not been successful.
- In patients with coronary artery disease and high cholesterol, niacin, in combination with a bile acid binding resin (colestipol, cholestyramine), another cholesterol medication, has been shown to slow down or reduce atherosclerosis, the hardening of coronary arteries due to plaque buildup.

IMPORTANT SAFETY INFORMATION

- NIASPAN is not for everyone, including those with liver problems, stomach ulcers, or serious bleeding problems; and those allergic to any product ingredient.
- NIASPAN is a long-acting form of niacin. Severe liver damage can occur when switching to NIASPAN from immediate-release niacin. All forms of niacin are not the same as NIASPAN, so do not switch between forms of niacin without first talking to your health care professional.
- Tell your health care professional about any unexplained muscle pain, tenderness, or weakness, as this could be a sign of a serious side effect. This risk may be increased when NIASPAN is taken with lovastatin or simvastatin, particularly in elderly patients and patients with diabetes, kidney problems, or thyroid problems.
- NIASPAN should be used with caution if you consume large amounts of alcohol. NIASPAN is associated with increases in liver enzymes measured by blood tests. Your health care professional may do blood tests before and during treatment with NIASPAN to check for liver problems.
- NIASPAN may cause an increase in blood sugar levels. If you have diabetes or higher than normal blood sugar levels, you should carefully check your blood sugar levels, especially during the first few months of NIASPAN and during any change in your dose. Report any changes in your blood sugar levels to your health care professional.
- NIASPAN should be used with caution in patients with kidney problems. Tell your health care professional if you have a history of gout or kidney problems.

Shouldn't you be trying something like this to help your heart's arteries?

Consider NIASPAN. For patients with high cholesterol and plaque in the arteries of the heart, NIASPAN, along with diet and another cholesterol medication (colestipol), is FDA-approved to not only slow down plaque buildup, but also help reduce the plaque that's already there¹.

You try to manage your cholesterol. You may have made changes to your diet and started exercising. But you still wonder, "Am I doing enough?" Ask your doctor about NIASPAN. In studies of up to 2.5 years, patients with high cholesterol and plaque buildup in the arteries of their heart, showed that NIASPAN, along with another cholesterol medication (colestipol), slowed down plaque buildup. In fact, for some patients, it actually helped reduce existing plaque.

NIASPAN is not for everyone, including those with liver problems, stomach ulcers, or serious bleeding problems; and those allergic to any product ingredient.

Ask your doctor if NIASPAN is right for you.

- The most common side effects include flushing, headache, diarrhea, nausea, vomiting, increased cough, and itching.
- Flushing (warmth, redness, itching, and/or tingling of the skin) is a common side effect of niacin therapy that may subside after several weeks of consistent NIASPAN use. Additional symptoms may include rapid or pronounced heartbeat, shortness of breath, sweating, chills, dizziness, fainting, and/or swelling. Flushing may vary in severity and is more likely to occur with initiation of therapy, or during dose increases. By dosing at bedtime, flushing will most likely occur during sleep. However, if awakened by flushing at night, you should get up slowly, especially if feeling dizzy, feeling faint, or taking blood pressure medications.
- If you are taking another cholesterol medication called a bile acid binding resin (colestipol, cholestyramine) along with NIASPAN, take these medicines at least 4 to 6 hours apart.
- Some medicines should not be taken with NIASPAN. Tell your health care professional about all the medicines you take, including prescription and non-prescription medicines, vitamins and herbal supplements, or other nutritional supplements containing niacin or nicotinamide. It is especially important to tell your health care professional if you take aspirin, any cholesterol medication, blood pressure medication, or anticoagulants, also known as blood thinners.

This is the most important information to know about NIASPAN. For more information, talk with your health care professional.

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IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT NIASPAN (niacin extended-release tablets)¹

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NIASPAN is used to increase good (HDL) cholesterol and lower bad (LDL) cholesterol and triglycerides.

NIASPAN can be used in combination with lovastatin or simvastatin to improve cholesterol levels when taking NIASPAN, simvastatin or lovastatin alone is not enough.

NIASPAN is also used to reduce the risk of recurrent heart attacks in people with a history of heart attack and high cholesterol.

In patients with high cholesterol and coronary artery disease, NIASPAN, when used with a bile acid binding resin, another cholesterol medication, has been shown to slow down or reduce the build-up of plaque in your arteries.

No additional benefit of NIASPAN on heart disease has been demonstrated when used with simvastatin or lovastatin over and above that shown for niacin, simvastatin or lovastatin when used alone.

Who should not take NIASPAN?

Anyone who is allergic to niacin, the active ingredient in NIASPAN, or to any of the inactive ingredients. Contact your health care professional for a list of inactive ingredients.

Anyone who has stomach ulcers, liver problems or serious bleeding disorders.

What should I tell my health care professional before taking NIASPAN?

Tell your health care professional about any other medications, vitamins, or nutritional supplements you are taking including any that contain niacin or nicotinamide.

It is especially important to tell your doctor if you take:

- Aspirin
- A statin (another cholesterol medication)
 - The risk of muscle pain, tenderness or weakness, which could lead to a rare but serious side effect, is increased when NIASPAN is taken with a statin.
- A bile acid binding resin (colestipol, colestyramine)
- Blood pressure medications
- Blood thinner medications

Tell your health care professional if you:

- Have a history of stomach ulcers, liver problems, kidney problems, or serious bleeding problems
- Have drug allergies
- Have diabetes
- Are pregnant or may become pregnant
- Are breast-feeding
- Consume large amounts of alcohol

professional. Severe liver damage can occur when switching to NIASPAN from immediate-release niacin.

Tell your health care professional about any unexplained muscle pain, tenderness, or weakness, as this could be a sign of a rare but serious side effect. This risk may be increased when NIASPAN is taken with a statin.

NIASPAN is associated with increases in liver enzymes measured by blood tests. Your health care professional may do blood tests before and during treatment with NIASPAN to check for liver problems.

NIASPAN may cause an increase in blood sugar levels. If you have diabetes or higher than normal blood sugar levels, you should carefully check your blood sugar levels especially during the first few months of NIASPAN and during any change in your NIASPAN dose. Report any changes in blood sugar levels to your health care professional.

The most common side effects are flushing, diarrhea, nausea, vomiting, increased cough, and itching.

Flushing:

Flushing (warmth, redness, itching and/or tingling of the skin) is a common side effect of NIASPAN therapy that may subside after several weeks of consistent NIASPAN use. Flushing may vary in severity and is more likely to occur with initiation of therapy or during dose increases. By dosing at bedtime, flushing will most likely occur during sleep. However, if awakened by flushing at night, you should get up slowly, especially if feeling dizzy, feeling faint, or taking blood pressure medications.

- Taking aspirin (up to the recommended dose of 325 mg) approximately 30 minutes before taking NIASPAN, as directed by a health care professional, may help manage flushing.
- Avoid ingestion of hot or alcoholic beverages and spicy foods around the time of taking NIASPAN to help manage flushing.
- Take NIASPAN with a low-fat snack at bedtime to help minimize upset stomach.

This safety information does not include all of the information people should know before taking NIASPAN. For a complete list of side effects, ask your health care professional.

General information about NIASPAN

Do not use NIASPAN for a condition for which it was not prescribed. Do not give NIASPAN to other people, even if they have the same condition you have. This leaflet summarizes the most important information about NIASPAN. If you would like more information, talk to your health care professional.

For more information call Abbott at 1-888-5-NIASPAN (1-888-564-2772) or visit www.niaspan.com.

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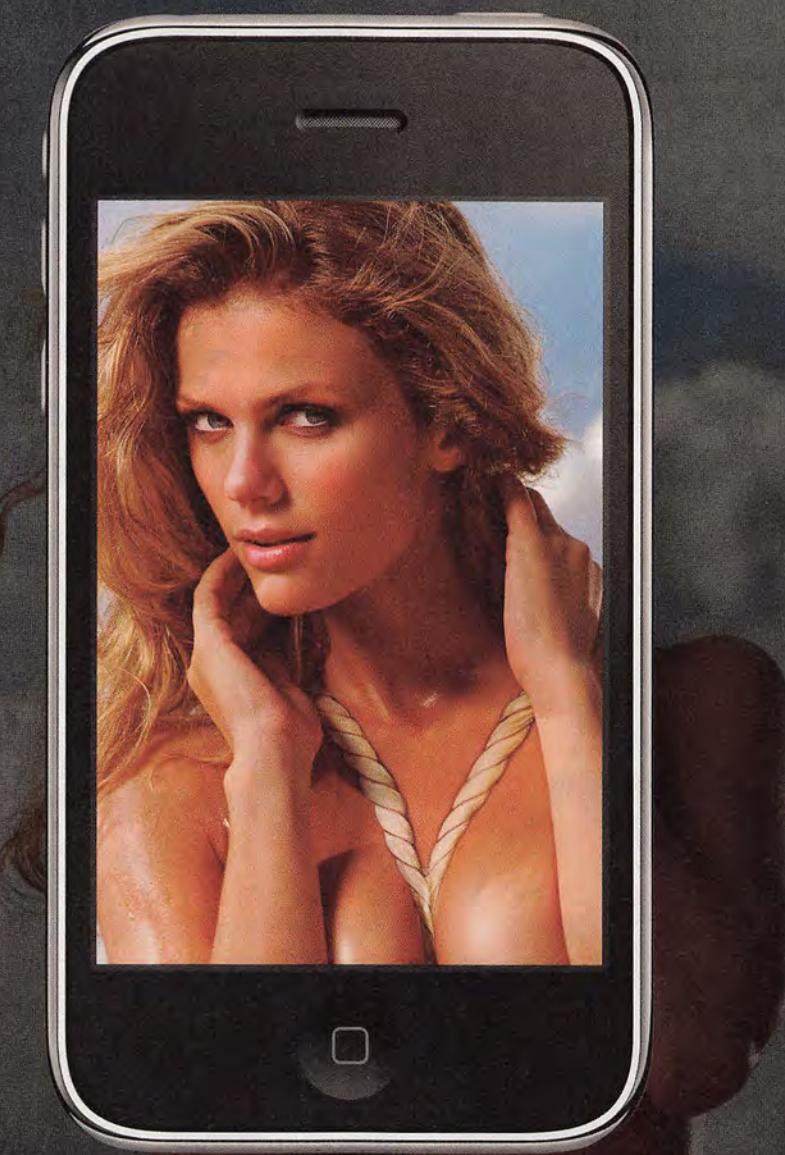
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What are the possible side effects of NIASPAN?

All forms of niacin are not the same as NIASPAN. Do not switch between forms of niacin without first talking to your health care



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**COLLEGE
FOOTBALL
PREVIEW**

Leap Year

Three resurgent programs—Oregon, Oklahoma State and Ole Miss—have what it takes to jump to BCS spoiler and national title contender

BY AUSTIN MURPHY

Photograph by LOUIS LOPEZ/CAL SPORT MEDIA



Oregon's Blount,
who hurdled a
defender on a
29-yard touchdown
run in the 2008
Holiday Bowl,
will be the featured
back in an offense
that could wreak
havoc in the Pac-10.



How will be this year's Texas Tech? Which up-and-coming outfit from a BCS conference will have a giddy, undefeated run into November? Which good-but-not-yet-great program will spoil the season of a pedigreed rival? Which overachieving squad will crack the top five and thrust itself into the national championship conversation? ¶ Like last year's Texas Tech—which started

10–0, broke the hearts of the Texas Longhorns and climbed to No. 2 in the land—this year's Texas Tech will feature a high-octane, risk-taking, crowd-pleasing offense with a seasoned quarterback disbursing the ball to a set of dazzling skill players. It will be the

beneficiary of serendipitous scheduling, all but one of its toughest games to be played at home. This year's Texas Tech will . . . not be Texas Tech. (Sorry, Red Raiders—you're breaking in a new quarterback.) Rather the upstart will come from among Oklahoma State, Ole Miss and Oregon.

Sure, Florida will kick it off against Texas in the BCS championship game on Jan. 7 in Pasadena, a month after Longhorns quarterback Colt McCoy edges Tim Tebow in one of the closest Heisman votes ever. Now, let's get back to those three programs that are ready to crash the party....

OKLAHOMA STATE

Pay no attention to the man with the blowtorch outside the office window of Oklahoma State coach Mike Gundy. That office overlooks Boone Pickens Stadium, whose \$282 million renova-

tion is, at long last, nearly finished. "There's been scaffolding outside my window for four years," says the coach. Well, it's gone now, in plenty of time for the Cowboys' Sept. 5 opener against Georgia, whose task it will be to slow the most frenetic offense in college football.

Two years and two-million-plus Internet views after his postgame philippic against *The Oklahoman* ("I'm a man! I'm 40!"), Gundy is still a man, albeit a slightly mellower one. Leaning back at his desk, he tells the story of dropping by his middle son's Little League practice this summer. The seven-year-old Gunnar was entertaining teammates with an animated performance that included him shouting, "It's garbage!"

Asked afterward what he was doing, Gunnar told his father, "I was showing them your rant. I've gotten pretty good at it!"

The Rant, in which Gundy ripped the newspaper for its critical reporting on the demotion and status of quarterback Bobby Reid, is old news in Stillwater. "Around here nobody cares about it," says Gundy, "but when I go out recruiting, it's the first thing [parents] bring up in the home. Moms love it."

A four-year starter at quarterback for Oklahoma State in the late 1980s, Gundy spent 10 years as an assistant in two stints at his alma mater

Big 12 foes know Robinson (11) and Hunter (24) can turn a busted play into a touchdown.

ROBINSON'S
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HOT TOPICS

What If?

5 story lines to watch

Harris should have Miami in the middle of what figures to be a crowded ACC race.

Blue skies ahead—or maybe not

When old rivals Notre Dame and Michigan meet on Sept. 12 in Ann Arbor, fans of both teams will be

looking for signs of significant improvement. After reaching BCS bowls in coach Charlie Weis's first two seasons, the Irish fell to 3–9 in 2007 and 7–6 last year, including a humbling late-season home loss to 3–9 Syracuse. With a roster that for the first time is made up almost entirely of Weis recruits, the Notre Dame faithful demand a Top 25 team. Rich Rodriguez is coming off a hellish debut season as Michigan coach: The Wolverines had one of the nation's worst offenses (109th) and the most losses in school history (nine, including a 35–17 thumping in South Bend). Now Rodriguez will put a freshman quarterback—spring enrollee Tate Forcier or Denard Robinson—at the controls of his spread attack.

Pryor commitments As Ohio State's starting quarterback fresh out of high school last year, Terrelle Pryor showed an uncanny ability to scramble and throw on the run. The 6' 6" 235-pounder completed 60.6% of his throws for 12 touchdowns and only four interceptions, and he also ran for 631 yards. He did all that with a limited playbook, but this year the Buckeyes are installing the pistol formation—a variation of the shotgun. In addition to keeping the offense moving through the air, Pryor will be counted on to help compensate for the loss of star running back Beanie Wells.

Running up and down the coast The Pac-10, known for its long line of prolific passers, is suddenly home to a bunch of

before replacing Les Miles as coach following the 2004 season. Gundy brought in coordinator Larry Fedora, who installed a fast-break spread offense that was as cutting edge as it was ill-suited to the Cowboys' personnel. Oklahoma State dropped seven of its eight Big 12 games in '05 but has improved steadily as the influx of athletes who fit the system picked up. (Fedora has since left to become the coach at Southern Miss.)

Key among those recruits is fifth-year senior Zac Robinson, the quarterback who replaced Reid. The son of an Oklahoma State alumna and the nephew of a former Pistol Pete (the school's student mascot), Robinson was overlooked by most college scouts while a wide receiver dur-

ing his junior season at Chatfield High in Littleton, Colo. After being switched to quarterback as a senior, he began fielding scholarship offers, eventually rewarding the Cowboys for their early interest in him.

Now a 6' 3", 218-pound dual threat with 4.55 speed in the 40, Robinson last season passed for 3,064 yards and rushed for another 562. But his most valuable asset, according to Gundy, is his football intellect. In the high-speed chess match that plays out before each snap, Robinson has mastered the art of getting the offense out of bad play calls at the last possible moment.

His job is made easier by two native Texans, running back Kendall (Spud) Hunter and wide receiver Dez Bryant, both juniors. Hunter rushed for 119.6 yards per game in '08, though he barely played in the second half of several games. "We probably cost him 400 yards," Gundy figures, "but we couldn't take the chance of getting him injured." Bryant, who in high school had his heart set on playing for

"WE'VE GOT SO MANY PEOPLE BELIEVING NOW," SAYS McCLUSTER.



LSU ("They wouldn't call me back," he says, "so I came here"), averaged 113.9 receiving yards a game and caught 19 TD passes despite facing double-team coverage over the last nine games.

Among the challenges of coaching Bryant, a 6' 2", 215-pound pogo stick, is keeping him calm—"I just get so much ... rage," he says, with a smile—when he isn't getting the ball. Says Gundy, "We have to tell him, 'Dez, here's the deal: You've got two guys on you and one running toward you. So Kendall's going to run for 200 yards today, and you're still going to be a first-round pick.'"

Though only 5' 8", the versatile McCluster is ideally suited to direct the Wild Rebel package.



the nation's top rushers. In a quarterback-rich Heisman race, can one of them run his way into contention? For starters, Cal junior Jahvid Best is the top returning rusher (131.7 yards per game) in Division I-A, Oregon State's Jacquizz Rodgers set a Pac-10 freshman record (1,253 yards) and Stanford's Toby Gerhart set a school record (1,136). There's also Oregon's LeGarrette Blount, who will step into a more prominent role after averaging 7.3 yards per carry as a part-timer. And the only reason USC won't produce an All-America tailback this year is because C.J. Gable, Stafon Johnson and Joe McKnight will be splitting the workload.

Inseparable Last year's most tightly contested conference was the ACC. Ten of the 12 teams finished either a conference-best 5–3 or 4–4 in league play. It won't get any easier this season. Virginia Tech, which won its second straight ACC title and got the league's first BCS bowl victory in nine years, has more weapons on offense. Georgia Tech's triple-option offense is a defensive coordinator's nightmare. North Carolina has significantly upgraded its defense. And Florida State (Christian Ponder), Miami (Jacoby Harris) and North Carolina State (Russell Wilson) should get more consistent play from second-year quarterbacks.

Mountain climbing After his conference put three teams in the final AP poll—including 13–0 Utah at No. 2—Mountain West commissioner Craig Thompson raised a stink about the league's outsider status in the BCS setup. His proposal for an eight-team playoff never stood a chance, but the MWC could eventually secure an automatic BCS berth if it continues to play at a high level. That's because last year the BCS began using a formula that evaluates conferences over a four-year period. This year Utah along with fellow Mountain West members TCU and BYU, as well as Boise State out of the WAC, will test the system that sets the five major bowl matchups.

—Stewart Mandel

On a recent July morning Hunter and Bryant are lounging in the team's new, 14,000-square-foot locker room with its state-of-the-art stalls, each with an electrical outlet, a deodorizing system and a backlit Oklahoma State helmet etched in glass. "When we first came," Hunter recalls, "we talked all the time about how we were going to change the program."

"It feels kind of unreal," Bryant adds, "because all those things we talked about are coming true."

But it's tough to move up in the world when your defense has established permanent residence in the bottom third of the national rankings (93rd in total defense a year ago, with an an-

emic 15 sacks). "We've had one defense in about the last 25 years that's been respectable," Gundy laments. "We haven't had the speed, the depth, the D-line to rush the passer. You can't get to the passer in this league, you're in trouble." Solution: Gundy poached Bill Young from Miami last January, luring the well-regarded coordinator to fill a vacancy at his alma mater. Young, whose makeover of the Kansas defense was instrumental in the Jayhawks' 2007 run to the Orange Bowl, specializes in putting heat on the QB, by any means necessary (page 77). No one is asking him to work miracles. "You get two or three key stops a game," says Gundy, "you don't end up 9–4. You end up 11–2 or 12–1. Last year we

lost to Texas by four down there. One more stop, we're tied for the [South Division]."

Gundy's goal upon taking over as coach five years ago was to become a fixture in the top 20. "And then, when you get the right players and the right chemistry and a few breaks," he says, "you can make a run."

OLE MISS

In a peculiar exercise in masochism, Mississippi fans kept track. They knew to the day how long it had been since their team had won an SEC game. That grim total reached 665 last Sept. 20. On that day the Rebels turned the ball over half a dozen times and blew a 17–7 lead on their way to a 23–17 loss to Vanderbilt. The next day

first-year coach Houston Nutt took an interesting tack. He did not raise his voice. He made the squad watch "five plays where everybody's doing everything right. I want you to see what that looks like."

"Guess what, guys," Nutt intoned, once the players had seen themselves at their best. "We go to the Swamp this week, and if you believe everybody outside this room, we're going to get beat by 33 points. Here's what I'd like for you to do: Think about those five plays, know the rules, take care of the ball, relax and just turn it loose down there. Let's see what happens."

What happened on Sept. 27, of course, was that Ole Miss won its first SEC game in 672 days, 31–30 over No. 4 Florida. The defeat



SNEAD'S GAME TOOK OFF WHEN HE STOPPED FORCING THROWS.

inspired Tebow's Promise: the vow, now immortalized on a plaque on the Gainesville campus, that A LOT OF GOOD WILL COME OUT OF THIS. Some good came of it for the victors as well. Just not right away. The Rebels dropped their next two games, then headed to Arkansas, Nutt's previous place of employment. "We go to Fayetteville in a fairly hostile environment"—he smiles at his own understatement—"and find a way to win. Then we just took off."

The Ole Miss team that closed out the season with six straight victories provided a study in the good things that can happen when a team buys into a coach's philosophy and begins to believe in itself. "Our confidence," Nutt says, "just exploded." It also served as a reminder (unnecessary, perhaps, on a campus whose 18-mph speed limit commemorates number 18, Archie Manning) of the importance of good quarterback play.

By the end of the 2006 season Jevan Snead had seen his future at Texas, and it was taking snaps in garbage time

behind Colt McCoy. "That wasn't how I'd pictured my college career," recalls Snead, a 6'3" junior from Stephenville, Texas, who had originally committed to Florida then switched to the Longhorns after Tebow pledged to the Gators. "So I decided to look around."

He transferred to Oxford and sat out the NCAA-required year, his presence on the scout team a daily torment to then coach Ed Orgeron and his staff. The best quarterback on the roster, by far, wouldn't be eligible until the '08 season, by which time the staff would end up fired. Snead is strong-armed and accurate, but his major flaw at first was his unwillingness to give up on plays. "For the first five games [of last season]," Nutt recalls, "he was trying so hard—forcing everything, throwing it to their guys. Then he realized, Hey, I don't have to be Superman on every play. And the game just slowed down for him."

Who needs Superman when you've got the Wild Rebel, the innovative single-wing formation that Nutt brought with him from Arkansas? Enter Dexter McCluster, a wide receiver

minding his own business, running sprints in the team's indoor facility in February 2008 when Nutt asked him, "Have you ever played running back?" It was college football's equivalent of being discovered in Schwab's drugstore. "As a matter of fact," replied McCluster, who had rushed for 2,490 yards and 39 touchdowns as a senior at Largo (Fla.) High, "I've been a running back all my life."

McCluster was soon lining up in the backfield and even taking snaps out of the shotgun, just as Darren McFadden had done

After switching off Florida and bolting Texas, Snead is passing Ole Miss to SEC glory.

in the Wild Hog at Arkansas. "He is electric," says Nutt of his latest multiple threat. "He can catch it, run it, throw it, hand it off." Between his rushing, receiving and returns, McCluster averaged 98.5 all-purpose yards per game in '08, and he was named offensive MVP of the Rebels' 47-34 Cotton Bowl win over Texas Tech. The senior's only problem, says Nutt, is that, at 5'8", "he has trouble seeing over the line."

Mississippi's problem, going into Nutt's second season, is that it won't be sneaking up on anyone. "We understand that people won't underestimate us anymore," says sackmeister Greg Hardy, a senior defensive end. "They're going to prepare for us a different way. We're O.K. with that."

They're O.K. with it because of the confidence spawned by the come-from-behind victory at Florida. For example: "We're down 14 points in the Cotton Bowl, but we knew we were going to make something happen," says McCluster. "We've got so many people believing right now, it's something we never had before."

It helps that the Rebels are flat-out loaded along the defensive line (page 76). And it helps that Mississippi's toughest SEC opponents—Alabama, Arkansas, Tennessee and LSU—must come to Oxford.

To Tebow's chagrin, the Rebels are not on Florida's schedule in '09. Unless the teams meet in an SEC championship game, they will not play again until at least 2012—at

The Great Heisman Race

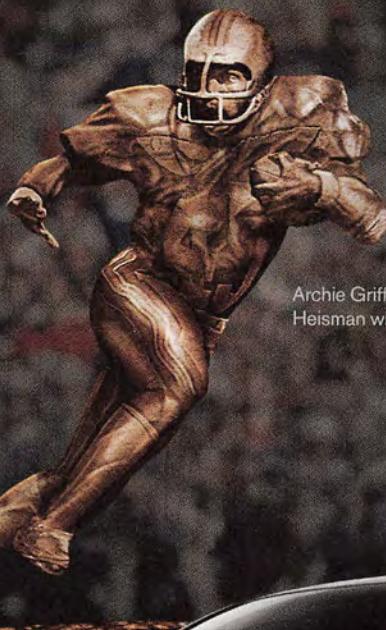
By Matt Maiocco

Open ➔

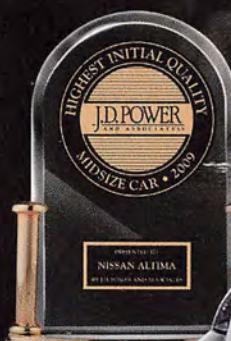
Track the Heisman contenders this season with SI's special foldout.

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Heisman winner, 1974 & 1975



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The Heisman Trophy. Presented by Nissan.

*The Nissan Altima received the lowest number of problems per 100 vehicles among midsize cars in the proprietary J.D. Power and Associates 2009 Initial Quality Study. Study based on responses from 80,930 new-vehicle owners, measuring 245 models and measures opinions after 90 days of ownership. Proprietary study results are based on experiences and perceptions of owners surveyed in February-May 2009. Your experiences may vary. Visit jdpower.com. Always wear your seat belt, and please don't drink and drive. ©2009 Nissan North America, Inc.

DE WHO WINS THE TROPHY IN 2009

The Great

ason return to make another run for the coveted statue. Quarterbacks Sam Bradford
mething to say about that, and some long shots are bound to move into contention

SEPT. 19

at Florida

sophomore to win the Heisman, in '07. He was quarterback on the national championship team last season, a national title and, of course, an are on his to-do list for '09. After opening with cupcakes (Charleston Southern and Troy), Tebow (below) gets down to business in his third run (he was No. 3 in the voting last year), when the Tennessee coach Lane Kiffin in his SEC debut. A-first quarterback who has continually evolved now will unveil an over-the-top throwing motion working on with new quarterbacks coach Scott Brady's tutor at Michigan). Will that translate to an aerial game? The first test will come against a strong Volunteers defense, coached by former career coordinator Monte Kiffin, Lane's dad.



NO. 5 // OCT. 3

USC at Cal

Despite nagging foot, ankle and elbow injuries, Cal's JAHVID BEST rushed for 1,580 yards last year, fifth best in the nation. Now he's fully recovered from two surgeries, stronger after adding 10 pounds over the off-season (a more muscular 195) and ready to crash the Heisman party. The 5' 10" junior is the most electric running back in the land, with six touchdown dashes of 60 yards or more as a sophomore. He finished 2008 with a bang, running for 311 yards and four TDs in less than three quarters against Washington and then 186 yards and two TDs in an Emerald Bowl win over Miami. Heisman voters won't be able to ignore Best if he has a monster game against the Trojans.

NO. 6 // OCT. 10

Alabama at Ole Miss

Quarterback JEVAN SNEAD turned heads with the Rebels' upset of Florida at the Swamp last season, and a victory over defensive-minded Alabama could catapult the junior into the Heisman mix. Coach Houston Nutt says he's putting more on the shoulders of Snead, and why not? The transfer from Texas threw for a combined 779 yards and nine touchdowns in the Rebels' final three outings, including a Cotton Bowl win over Texas Tech. Expect more of the same with a schedule that includes two I-AA schools (Southeastern Louisiana and Northern Arizona), plus Alabama-Birmingham and Memphis.



Watch videos of SI's top 16 picks, including Tim Tebow's jump pass against Kentucky in 2007, Doug Flutie's Hail Mary



The

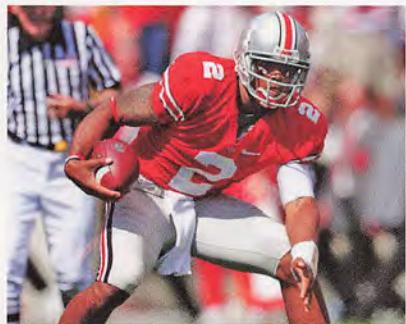
On the 75th anniversary of the award, the top three vote-getters from last season are vying for the trophy. Last year's winner, Colt McCoy, is the favorite to repeat. But Texas passer Colt McCoy, the runner-up last season, will have some competition.



NO. 1 // SEPT. 5

BYU vs. Oklahoma

Sooners junior **SAM BRADFORD**—the 11th player to return to school after winning the Heisman—opens his bid to repeat at the Dallas Cowboys' sparkling new stadium, in a matchup that shapes up as a shootout. Facing a thin BYU secondary, which ranked 74th in the nation against the pass in '08, Bradford should pick up where he left off last season, when he threw for 4,720 yards and 50 TDs (and became the fifth Oklahoma player to win the Heisman). But can another trophy hopeful, Cougars senior quarterback **MAX HALL** (above), steal the show? Following in the footsteps of BYU greats, including Gifford Nielsen, Jim McMahon and Heisman winner Ty Detmer, Hall directed the nation's sixth-ranked passing attack last year, and if he can orchestrate an opening-week stunner—the Sooners were 99th in pass defense in 2008—he could go from Heisman dark horse to contender overnight.



NO. 2 // SEPT. 12

USC at Ohio State

We'll find out fast if **TERRELLE PRYOR** (above) is ready to be a national star. The Ohio State sophomore gets the opportunity to make an early statement against a USC defense that brings back only three starters. But which Pryor will show up: the jittery underclassman who committed a pair of costly turnovers late in a 13–6 loss to Penn State last October or the playmaker who showed great poise against Texas in the Fiesta Bowl?

NO. 4 //

Tennessee

He was the first Heisman winner to start at quarterback since Tim Tebow in '08. An underdog, he'll be another Heisman candidate with a pair of wins over No. 1 Tebow at a Heisman Contender Game. Gators host Tennessee. Originally a running back, he has been won over by Loeffler (Tom Brady) and an NFL-caliber career. What should be a battle of the Tampa Bay Buckeyes.



NO. 3 // SEPT. 19

Utah at Oregon

Ducks quarterback **JEREMIAH MASOLI** dazzled as a sophomore at the end of last season, running and passing for a total of 13 touchdowns in victories over Arizona, Oregon State and Oklahoma State. No wonder the Oregon faithful are calling him the Tim Tebow of the West. A dual threat in coach Chip Kelly's heart-stopping spread-option offense, Masoli could move up in the Heisman race with a big game against last season's undefeated BCS buster.

Heisman

(the 2008 recipient) of Oklahoma and Tim Tebow ('07) of Florida have a shot at joining the list of Heisman winners. Here's how it could happen as the season progresses. Follow the can't-miss games below and decide for yourself.



NO. 7 // OCT. 17 Texas vs. Oklahoma

A Big 12 title shot, an invite to the BCS championship game and the Heisman could be on the line when the bitter rivals meet at the Cotton Bowl in Dallas. In last year's game Heisman runner-up **COLT MCCOY** (above) made the difference for the Longhorns with his poise and ability to make plays with his feet. He passed for 277 yards, didn't turn the ball over and completed 4 of 6 for 59 yards on third downs in the second half. **BRADFORD** (left) will get a chance to make up for an uneven performance in the 45–35 loss, in which he threw for 387 yards and five touchdowns but also tossed a pair of interceptions.

NO. 8 // OCT. 31 Florida vs. Georgia

The Gators' last big challenge of the regular season will come in Jacksonville, at the World's Largest Outdoor Cocktail Party. Two years ago **TEBOW** was sacked six times and had the worst game of his career in a loss to Georgia. Last year he accounted for five TDs in a 49–10 rout that ended the Dawgs' national title hopes.



NO. 9 // OCT. 31 Texas at Oklahoma State

This will be the Horns' toughest game on hostile territory. **MCCOY** threw for 391 yards in a 28–24 squeaker last year, but this time an enemy wideout could upstage him. Oklahoma's **DEZ BRYANT** (above) warrants Heisman hype. The flying junior is not only the nation's top returning receiver, with 19 catches, 19 touchdowns in 2008, with Zac Robinson to him again this fall—but he is also a game-changer. (Punt returns of 78 and 71 yards for TDs.)

in Race

ning Ohio State running back Archie Griffin (1974 and '75) as a two-time
self before the presentation on Dec. 12 **By Albert Chen**

NO. 10 // NOV. 7 Ohio State at Penn State

Looking for a sleeper to enter the Heisman debate late in the season? Keep an eye on Penn State quarterback **DARYLL CLARK** (below). The Nittany Lions lost three All-Big Ten offensive linemen and two of Clark's favorite receivers, but the dynamic senior, who threw for 19 touchdowns and ran for another 10 last year, can handle the extra load. If Clark leads Penn State to an undefeated season—the game against Ohio State being the primary obstacle—he will have punched his ticket to New York.



NO. 11 // DEC. 5 Big 12 Championship Game

A Heisman candidate makes a final statement at Cowboys Stadium in Arlington, Texas, but will it be **BRADFORD** or **McCoy** (above)? Last year Bradford sealed his Heisman with a 384-yard outing against Missouri in the conference title game.

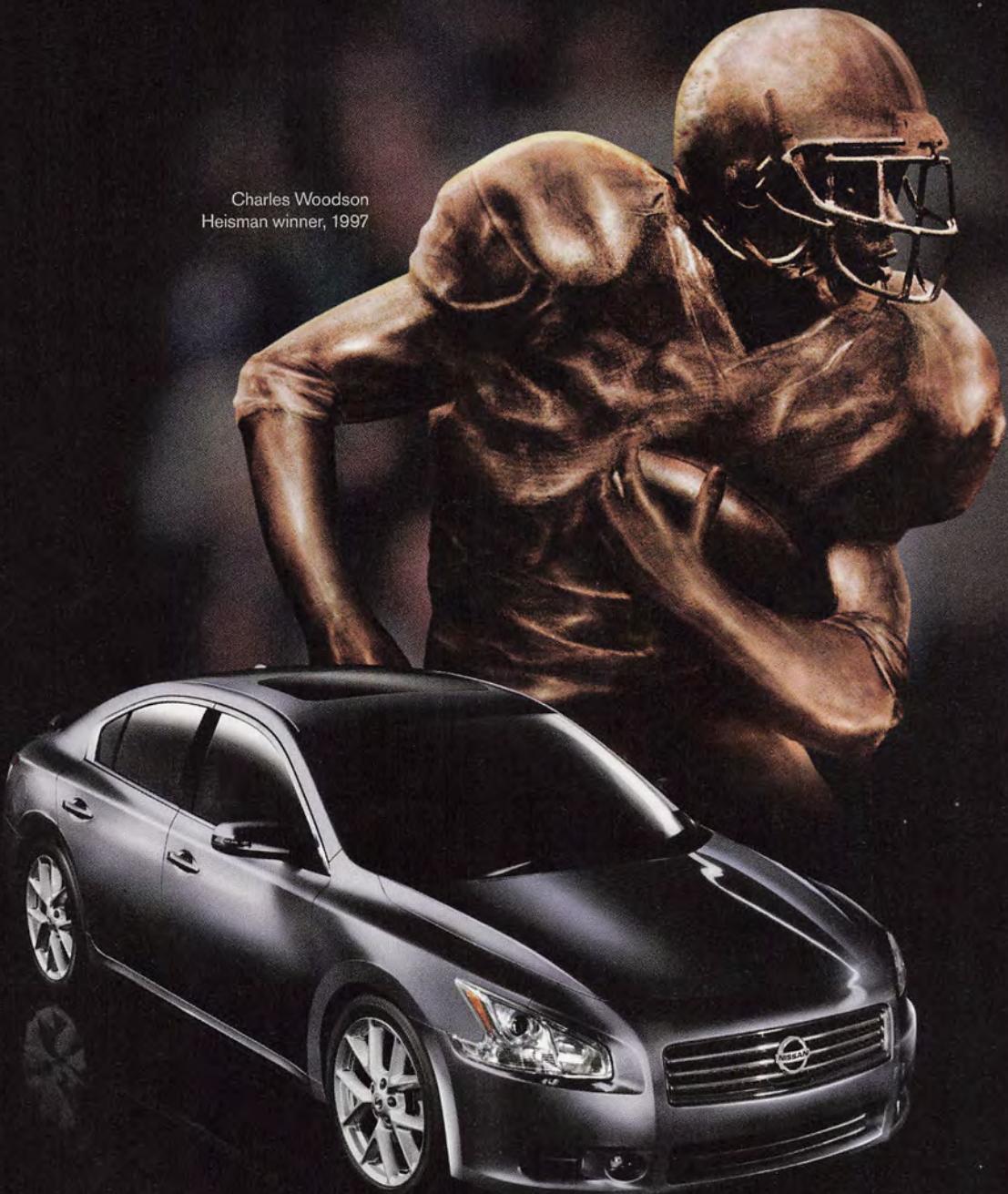
NO. 12 // DEC. 5 SEC Championship Game

The fourth quarter of last year's SEC title game was vintage **TEBOW**, who rallied Florida to victory over Alabama and gave Heisman voters reason to pause. The stage in Atlanta figures to belong to Tebow again when the defending national champions attempt to send their star signal-caller out on top.

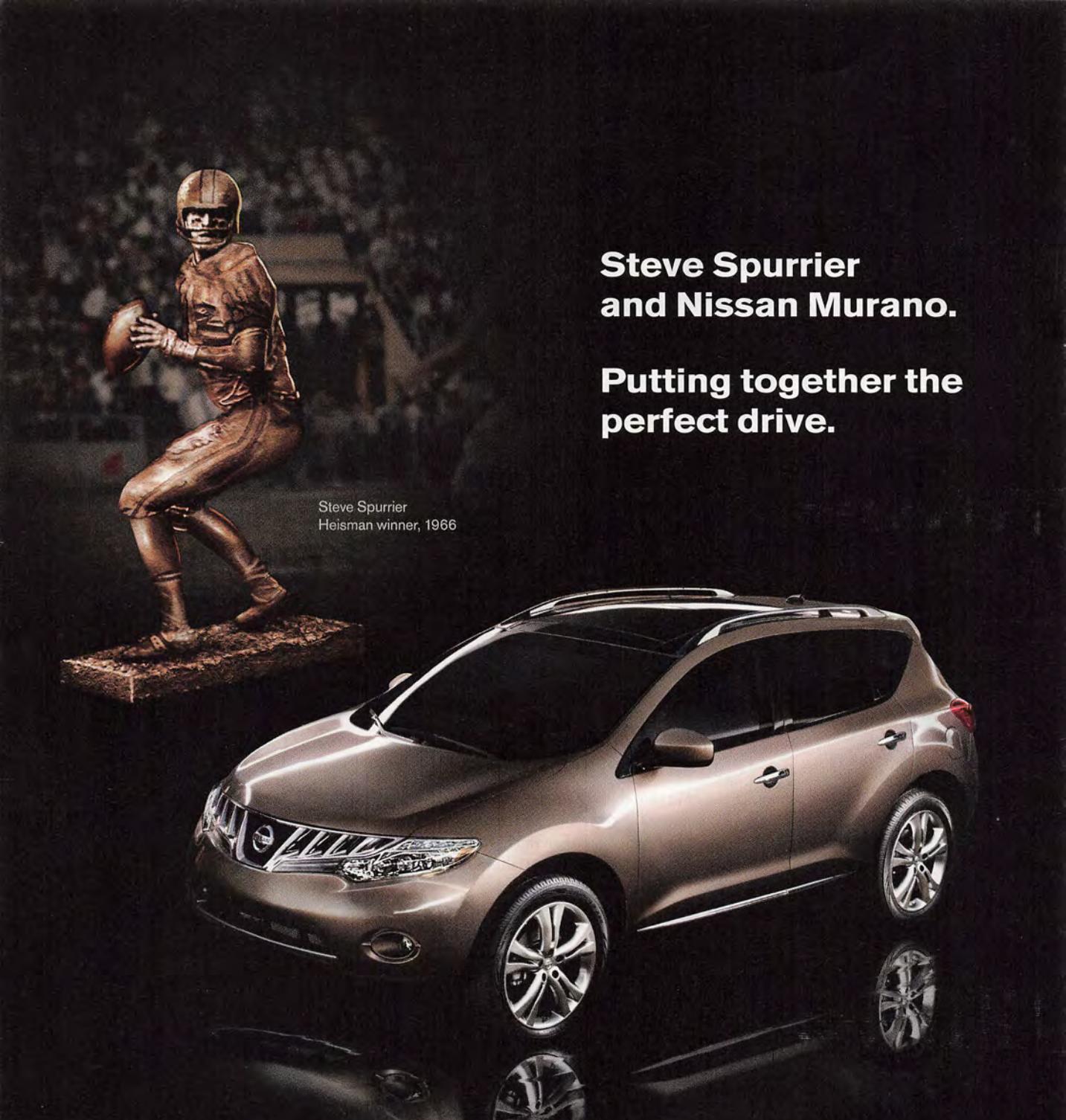
And SI's projected winner is ... McCoy, who will lead the Longhorns to 13 consecutive victories and become the fifth Heisman runner-up to be named college football's player of the year the following season.

surf. Last year in Austin, but overshadowed Oklahoma State's The high-receiver—87 on throwing, 100 on special

Charles Woodson
Heisman winner, 1997



Look Closer. He wore number 2. Because there were two of him: Charles Woodson the big-play cornerback and Charles Woodson the punt returner/receiver. Both athletic marvels. Both a thrill to their fans. Reminds us of a car we know. Maxima has a split personality of its own. One moment it's a sophisticated sedan with double-stitched leather seats, voice recognition and available touch-screen navigation. The next it's a thrilling sports car: a 290-hp V6 paired with a 4-mode



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Steve Spurrier
Heisman winner, 1966

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**Charles Woodson
and Nissan Maxima.**

Dual threats.

intelligent CVT transmission. Really, it's both. So while Woodson earned himself the title of Heisman winner, Maxima boasts a pretty impressive title of its own – the 4-Door Sports Car. Learn more at NissanUSA.com.

For more on Charles Woodson and other Heisman winners, check out si.com/Heisman.



The Heisman Trophy. Presented by Nissan.

Masoli, who set a rushing mark for Oregon QBs, runs the triple option over Pac-10 opponents.

which point it will have been at least 1,810 days since Florida defeated Ole Miss.

OREGON

The first play that quarterback Jeremiah Masoli queues up during a late July tape session is Oregon's opening snap in the Holiday Bowl last December. What appears to be a garden-variety screen to a wideout—Masoli throws a quick hitch to Jeff Maehl—turns interesting when Maehl, running parallel to the line of scrimmage, pitches back to Masoli, who throws a 47-yard strike to wideout Jamere Holland, setting the tone for Oregon's wide-open, 42–31 victory over Oklahoma State.

Masoli is the latest and least likely in the long line of superb Oregon quarterbacks. After transferring from City College of San Francisco, he was fifth on the depth chart as a sophomore entering preseason practice in 2008. Demonstrating a savant's grasp of offensive coordinator Chip Kelly's bewildering triple option, he was named the starter by the fourth game of the season—by which time, Masoli notes, his head had yet to stop spinning from trying to digest Oregon's playbook.

"Physically, I was ready last year," he says. "Mentally, definitely not." It took time for him to master such nuances as executing ball fakes to Kelly's satisfaction and selling the defense on that Holiday Bowl play. "After I throw it the first time," he says of the toss to Maehl, "you see how I walk back a few steps, like the play is over."

Next up on the tape, Masoli takes a shotgun snap, freezes the linebackers with a silky fake to the running back and then takes off, bowling over a free safety on his way to a spectacular 41-yard touchdown. At a school known



BUILT LIKE A FULLBACK, MASOLI IS MORE DURABLE THAN DIXON.

for mobile quarterbacks—Akili Smith, Kellen Clemens, Dennis Dixon—Masoli set an Oregon season rushing record (718 yards) for the position in his first year out of junior college. Built like a fullback (5' 11", 214), he is more durable than the willowy Dixon. By the end of last season Masoli was running Oregon's zone read, if it's possible, more skillfully than Dixon once did. Over the final three games (including against the quality defenses of Arizona and Oregon State) Masoli threw for 830 yards and six touchdowns, and ran for 248 and seven.

With an entire off-season to

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Stewart Mandel writes about the two teams he believes will play in the BCS title game at [SI.com/bonus](#)

prepare as the starter, Masoli will be even better in '09. Little wonder there is guarded optimism around Oregon's football offices that, with some luck, this kid could carry the Ducks to a special season (*page 84*).

Back in the video room it's LeGarrette Blount's turn. A vexing blend of speed and power, the 6' 2", 240-pound senior from East Mississippi Community College rushed for 1,002 yards last season (7.3 yards per carry) as a backup to Jeremiah Johnson. Accelerating into the secondary on one play, Blount hurdles an Oklahoma State safety en route to the end zone. Another Blount highlight, this one from Oregon's 65–38 Civil War beatdown of Oregon State: He uses just enough wiggle to elude a linebacker on his way to a 46-yard pickup. "I threw the stiff-arm too early," says Blount, critiquing himself.

"You ain't even got a stiff-arm," says tight end Ed Dick-

son, not long before seizing the remote control to find highlights of himself. And they are plentiful. Among the nation's top tight ends, the 6' 5", 243-pound senior is arguably the most versatile as well, lining up next to a tackle, in the slot, split wide and in the backfield. Every so often Kelly even uses Dickson as a pitch back.

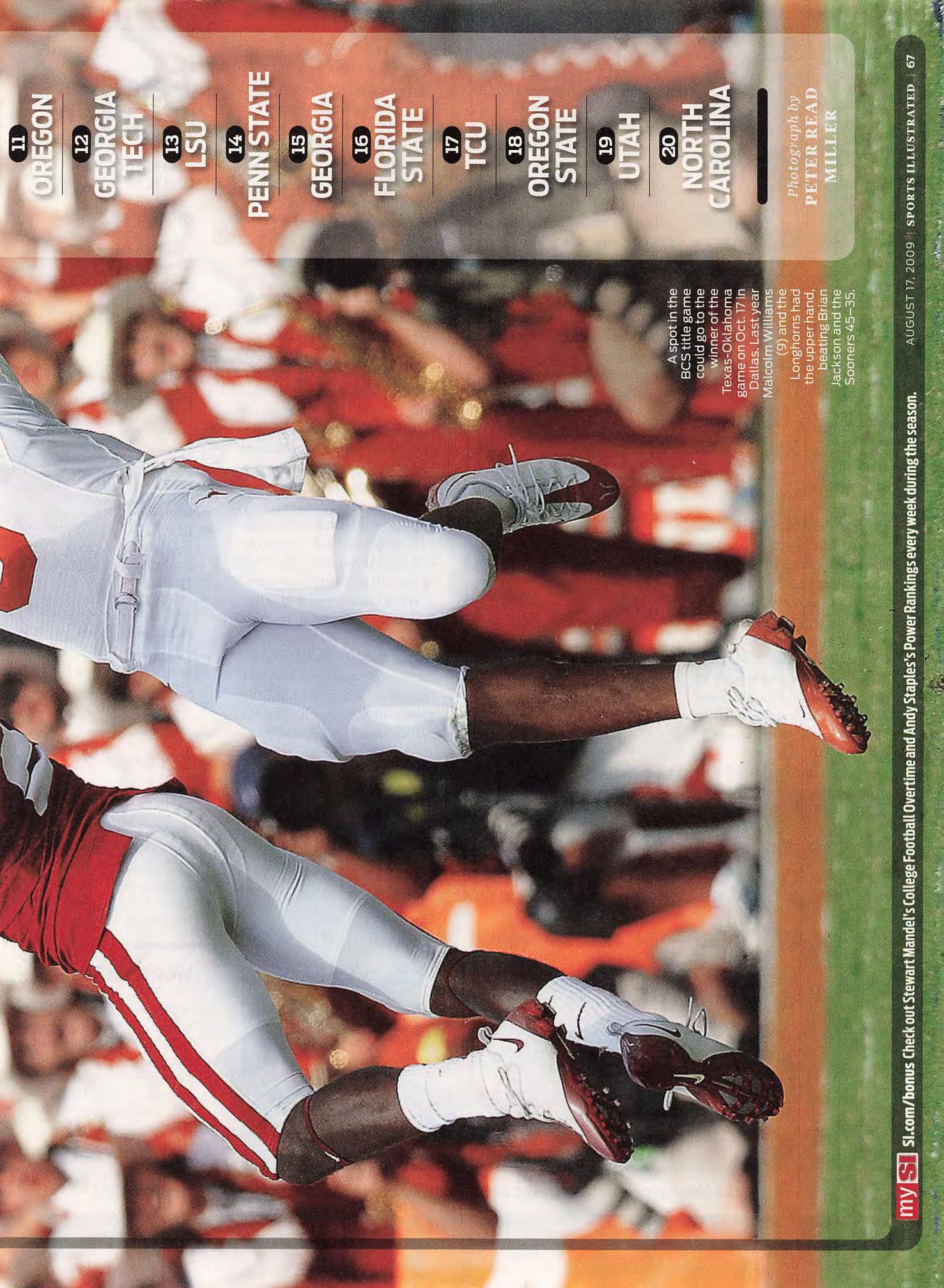
Dickson had a career game against Boise State last season, catching seven passes for 103 yards and two touchdowns, but any reference to that subject throws a wet blanket over the room. Masoli was knocked out in the first quarter of what he—and all of Duck Nation—regarded as a cheap shot. With Masoli out, Boise State upset the Ducks 37–32.

As it happens, Oregon opens on Sept. 3 on the blue turf at Bronco Stadium. Blount puts it bluntly: "We owe that team an ass-whuppin'" A tense silence ensues, until Dickson breaks it. "You know something," he says, "my favorite color is blue." □

TOP
20

1	FLORIDA
2	TEXAS
3	OKLAHOMA
4	USC
5	VIRGINIA TECH
6	OLE MISS
7	OKLAHOMA STATE
8	ALABAMA
9	BOISE STATE
10	OHIO STATE

College Football Preview



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OREGON

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**GEORGIA
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LSU

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PENN STATE

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GEORGIA

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**OREGON
STATE**

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UTAH

20
**NORTH
CAROLINA**

Photograph by
**PETER READ
MILLER**

A spot in the
BCS title game
could go to the
winner of the
Texas-Oklahoma
game on Oct. 17 in
Dallas. Last year
Malcolm Williams
(9) and the
Longhorns had
the upper hand,
beating Brian
Jackson and the
Sooners 45-35.

I

FLORIDA

The team to beat is so hungry to repeat that it refuses to be outworked

MINUTES AFTER the final whistle of spring practice had blown, coach Urban Meyer told strength assistant Mickey Marotti to put the defending national champions through the toughest off-season Florida had ever had. "We'll make it so hard," Meyer said, "that they're going to have a hard time picking up the *Street & Smith's* magazine that tells them how good they are."

On a July morning so humid that the air felt like crab bisque, a panting senior linebacker Ryan Stamper was asked whether Marotti had carried out Meyer's orders. "Stamp, was it hard today?" Marotti asked with the hint of a smile. "Was it hard?"

Of course it was hard. It had to be. With all 11 starters back on defense and a Heisman-winning quarterback with two national titles on his résumé, the Gators are more loaded than any other defending national champion since the 2005 USC team—and that's why they must outwork everyone else in July. The Trojans were denied a second straight consensus national title when they lost to Texas in the Rose Bowl. Florida doesn't want to fall short in its

FLORIDA'S MIND-SET: WITHOUT A TITLE, THE SEASON IS A FAILURE.

bid to become the first outright repeat national champion since Nebraska in 1994 and '95.

"This year," Stamper says, "everyone has the mind-set that if we don't win the national championship, [the season] is a failure."

A sample drill from Marotti's program: The blocking sled that Stamper drives at 60-yard intervals at the end of the workout, after all the running and lifting, is loaded with only 180 pounds. To Stamper's already wobbly legs, it feels like 1,000. But, say, in the fourth quarter against LSU, Stamper will be able to fight through exhaustion, shed his blocker and make the tackle. Similarly, sophomore wideout Deonte Thompson—one of the players Meyer hopes can replace breakaway talent Percy Harvin—will burn a tired cornerback, or quarterback Tim Tebow will blast through the line for a first down on fourth-and-short.

If the Gators win it all, they will have succeeded in part because Marotti did his job over the summer. On that July morning Stamper answered Marotti's question. "Yeah, it's hard," the player told the coach. "But it's getting easier." —Andy Staples

The fleet-footed Thompson is one of the players with a shot at replacing Harvin as the offense's top playmaker.



Fast Facts

CONFERENCE: SEC
COACH: Urban Meyer (5th year)

2008 RECORD: 13–1 (7–1 in SEC)

FINAL AP RANK: 1

RETURNING STARTERS: 18

Offense 7, Defense 11

SCHEDULE

SEPTEMBER

5 Charleston Southern
12 Troy
19 Tennessee
26 at Kentucky

OCTOBER

→ 10 at LSU
17 Arkansas
24 at Mississippi State
31 Georgia
in Jacksonville

NOVEMBER

7 Vanderbilt
14 at South Carolina
21 Florida International
28 Florida State

KEY GAME

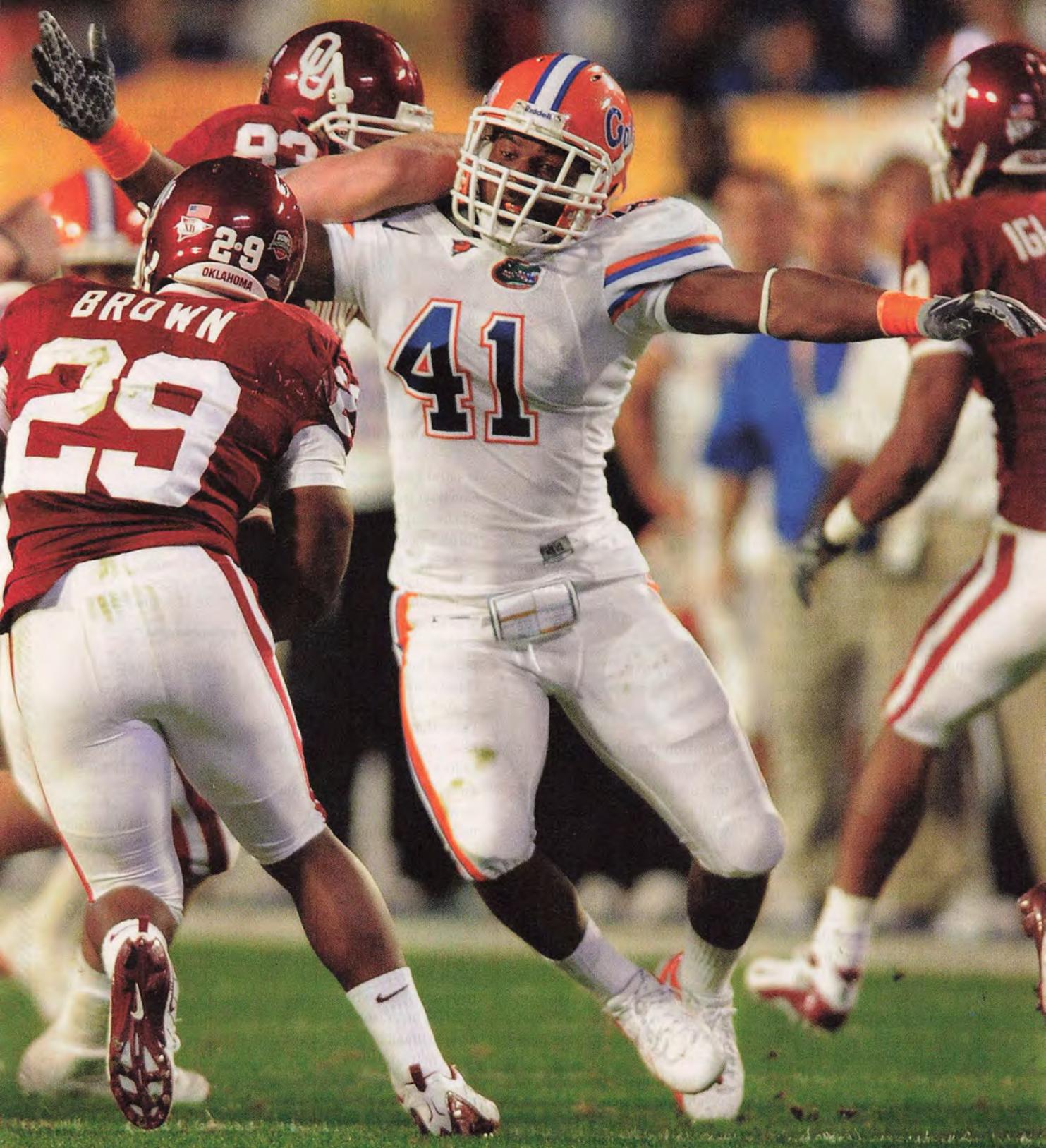
Tim Tebow's first trip to Death Valley, in 2007, was one to forget: 12 of 26 passing for 158 yards and an interception in a 28–24 loss. He'll have to be on his game in what figures to be the Gators' toughest road test.

WORTH NOTING

A 31–30 loss to Ole Miss in 2008 marked the 10th straight year in which Florida lost to at least one team from the SEC West. In consecutive weeks the Gators face LSU, Arkansas and Mississippi State out of the West.

my SI SI.com/florida Get the latest and best Gators stories, statistics and fan blogs from across the Web, handpicked by the editors of SI.

Stamper, who got a championship ring for the victory over Oklahoma, pushed himself in the off-season to make sure he goes out a winner.



2

TEXAS

Sack artist Sergio Kindle and the Horns have some unfinished business

IT WON'T just be the eyes of Texas upon Sergio Kindle this season. NFL scouts, the same ones who did not rate Kindle as a potential first-round draft choice after his junior season, will be watching. Opponents will be keeping close tabs on him as well because Kindle, who had 10 sacks last year shifting between linebacker and defensive end, is the Longhorn most capable of disrupting an offense. Then there are Kindle's own eyes—his goal is to look in the mirror at season's end and see the nation's leader in sacks staring back at him.

Texas, which led the nation with 47 sacks in 2008, needs that kind of production from Kindle to help offset the departure of key members of last season's defensive front, most notably end Brian Orakpo, the Nagurski winner as the best defensive player in the country. (Ironically, it was the Longhorns' inability to slow Texas Tech quarterback Graham Harrell that cost them an undefeated season and a shot at the national title.) But with fewer big-play artists on defense, Kindle can expect much more



TWS/NON/RM

A discouraging report from NFL scouts has made Kindle eager to please.

"I EXPECT TO GET DOUBLE-TEAMED," SAYS KINDLE.

attention than he drew a year ago. "The coaches have already told me that I can expect to get double-teamed," says Kindle, who will continue to split time between linebacker and end. "I'm prepared for it. Let it come."

To help him deal with the increased attention, the 6' 4" Kindle gained 16 pounds, to 255, over the off-season without giving up quickness. Defensive coordinator Will Muschamp, who describes Kindle's position as DPR—designated pass rusher—shows video of NFL pass-rushing linebackers such as James Harrison of the Steel-

ers and DeMarcus Ware of the Cowboys to Kindle as examples of the impact the Longhorns think he can make.

After last season Kindle considered trying to terrorize quarterbacks on the pro level until he was shown a report from NFL evaluators about his draft prospects if he left school early. The report tabbed him as a likely second- or third-rounder. "After I saw that, I didn't even bother reading the rest of it," he says. "I just crushed it and threw it away. It's all for the best because now I can help this team win a national championship."

The biggest obstacle for Kindle to overcome may have nothing to do with football. He was suspended for three games in his sophomore season following a DWI arrest in July 2007, and he suffered a mild concussion in June when, while allegedly texting, he crashed his car into an apartment building. If he can avoid that kind of trouble off the field, he'll be free to create lots more havoc on it. —Phil Taylor

Fast Facts

CONFERENCE: Big 12

COACH: Mack Brown (12th year)

2008 RECORD: 12–1 (7–1 in Big 12)

FINAL AP RANK: 4

RETURNING STARTERS: 14

Offense 8, Defense 6

SCHEDULE

SEPTEMBER

5 Louisiana-Monroe
12 at Wyoming
19 Texas Tech
26 UTEP

OCTOBER

10 Colorado
17 Oklahoma
in Dallas
24 at Missouri
→ 31 at Oklahoma State

NOVEMBER

7 Central Florida
14 at Baylor
21 Kansas
26 at Texas A&M

KEY GAME

Yes, the Red River Rivalry against Oklahoma will have national title implications, but the trip to Stillwater will be no picnic and comes at the end of a difficult three-game stretch.

WORTH NOTING

Eight freshmen were January enrollees. The newcomer most likely to see early playing time is Alex Okafor, a 6' 4", 240-pound defensive end from Pflugerville, Texas, who shot up the depth chart by the end of spring practice.

3

OKLAHOMA

A new crew of blockers has to quickly get in sync for OU to have another shot at a title

PERHAPS Oklahoma's mass-communications department should add coach Bob Stoops to its faculty because he could certainly teach a class in sending messages through the media. Stoops may have been addressing reporters at spring practice in March, but there was no question that he was really talking to the members of the Sooners' rebuilt offensive line. "They,

right now, are the weak link of the team," Stoops said. "They've been very inconsistent in how they work and in their toughness and discipline. They need to make an improvement if we're going to have any chance to contend for a championship."

His bluntness most likely was meant to be more motivational tool than expression of genuine concern, but Stoops's assessment seems accurate. Oklahoma lost four of the five starting linemen on the highest-scoring team in NCAA history (716 points), supreme blockers who allowed quarterback Sam Bradford to throw 50 touchdown passes. The only returnee from that group is 6'5", 318-pound senior Trent Williams, and he's adjusting to the

STOOPS WASN'T OFF BASE WHEN HE CALLED OUT HIS O-LINE.

switch from right tackle to left.

Williams and his new partners along the line—senior Brian Simmons and sophomore Stephen Good at guard, junior Cory Brandon at right tackle and redshirt freshman Ben Habern at center—heard Stoops's message loud and clear. "He's telling us that a lot is expected, and no one's going to cut us any slack just because we've got some guys who are new starters," Simmons says. "When your coach calls you out, it should drive you to give an even greater effort."

The effort has been good enough to allay the concerns of offensive coordinator Kevin Wilson, the line coach before being promoted in 2005. "These guys have already shown me a lot," Wilson said during practice this month. "They're not seasoned yet, but they're as talented as any group in the league."

Stoops, however, is still playing bad cop. "They have some work to do in terms of dependability, toughness, getting assignments right," he says. That's his way of informing the linemen that he'll let their fall performance tell him how well they responded to his spring challenge. —P.T.

The lone returning starter on the offensive line, Williams shifts from right tackle to protect Bradford's blind side.



Fast Facts

CONFERENCE: Big 12

COACH: Bob Stoops (11th year)

2008 RECORD: 12–2 (7–1 in Big 12)

FINAL AP RANK: 5

RETURNING

STARTERS: 14

Offense 5, Defense 9

SCHEDULE

SEPTEMBER

5 BYU

in Arlington, Texas

12 Idaho State

19 Tulsa

OCTOBER

3 at Miami

10 Baylor

→ 17 Texas

in Dallas

24 at Kansas

31 Kansas State

NOVEMBER

7 at Nebraska

14 Texas A&M

21 at Texas Tech

28 Oklahoma State

KEY GAME

The Sooners dominated the Longhorns in the first half of the decade, winning five straight games by an average of 27 points. Since then Texas has won three of four in the bitter rivalry.

WORTH NOTING

Since conference play began in 1996, Oklahoma has allowed the fewest points in Big 12 regular-season action. But the 246 points the Sooners surrendered in eight conference games last year were the most given up since Bob Stoops took over in 1999.

4

USC

Even with an untested quarterback, the Trojans shouldn't miss a beat

CARSON PALMER won a Heisman. Matt Leinart got one too and became a favorite of both Paris and Perez Hilton. No trophy for Mark Sanchez, but he ended up dating the Estée Lauder model Hilary Rhoda, with whom he posed in *GQ* last spring. Who's next on this launching pad to stardom, the quarterbacking gig at USC?

Meet Aaron Corp, the rangy (6' 4", 195) redshirt sophomore who, at first glance, would appear to lack the Q rating and sizzle of his predecessors. Though, this season, that might not be such a bad thing.

The Trojan known to his teammates as Corp earned the starting job in the spring based on—this doesn't sound very sexy, does it?—his grasp of the playbook and steady, error-free play. "I just focused on playing consistent, playing within myself," says the understated, unassuming Corp. His goal: "Not trying to do too much, and letting our playmakers make plays."

That eagerness to distribute the ball works well in an offense with a constellation of stars. The line returns intact,

Corp has thrown only four passes in college, but he is a threat to run.

USC WILL PLAY IT SAFE, AND THAT'S A GOOD THING.

as do all but one of last season's top skill-position players (wideout Patrick Turner). USC was loaded at running back *before* the spring emergence of sophomore Marc Tyler and redshirt freshman Curtis McNeal, of whom coach Pete Carroll effused, "He's tough, instinctive, fast, creative. He can catch the ball, and he blocks beautifully. He's going to play for sure in the fall."

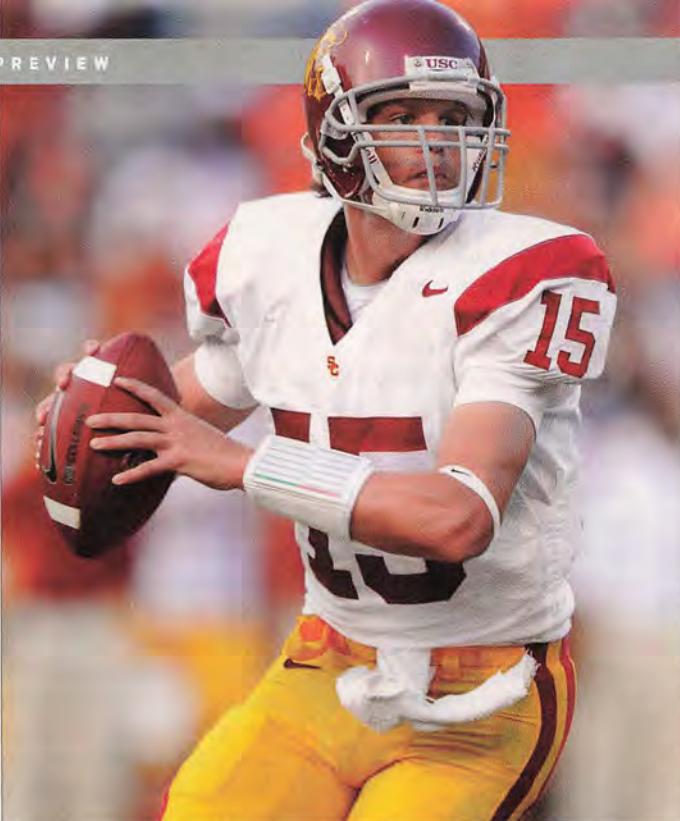
Another new face is that of offensive coordinator Jeremy Bates, 32, who arrives from the Denver Broncos with a reputation for innovation. It will be interesting to see what Bates

does with Corp, who has run the 40 in 4.5 and is by far the most dangerous runner to quarterback a Carroll-era USC team. The coach has stayed true to his pro-style roots, but the system Corp ran at Orange (Calif.) Lutheran High included elements of the veer and the zone-read option. Might the Trojans be entering a brave new world?

That would be a no, says Bates, who adds, "I think winning seven Pac-10 titles in a row is kind of impressive. We're going to stay true to our nature: run the ball, run some keepers and feature a drop-back passing game like the NFL's." (Should Corp get his bell rung on one of those keepers, Carroll will have no qualms entrusting the offense to incoming freshman Matt Barkley, whom he calls the great surprise of the spring.)

With Corp at the controls, USC will play it safe, and that's a good thing. As loaded as this offense is, there's no telling how far a caretaker can take it.

—Austin Murphy



ROB TRINGAL/SPORTSCHROME/GETTY IMAGES

Fast Facts

CONFERENCE: Pac-10

COACH: Pete Carroll (9th year)

2008 RECORD: 12–1 (8–1 in Pac-10)

FINAL AP RANK: 3

RETURNING

STARTERS: 12

Offense 9, Defense 3

SCHEDULE

SEPTEMBER

- 5 San Jose State
- 12 at Ohio State
- 19 at Washington
- 26 Washington State

OCTOBER

- 3 at Cal
- 17 at Notre Dame
- 24 Oregon State
- 31 at Oregon

NOVEMBER

- 7 at Arizona State
- 14 Stanford
- 28 UCLA

DECEMBER

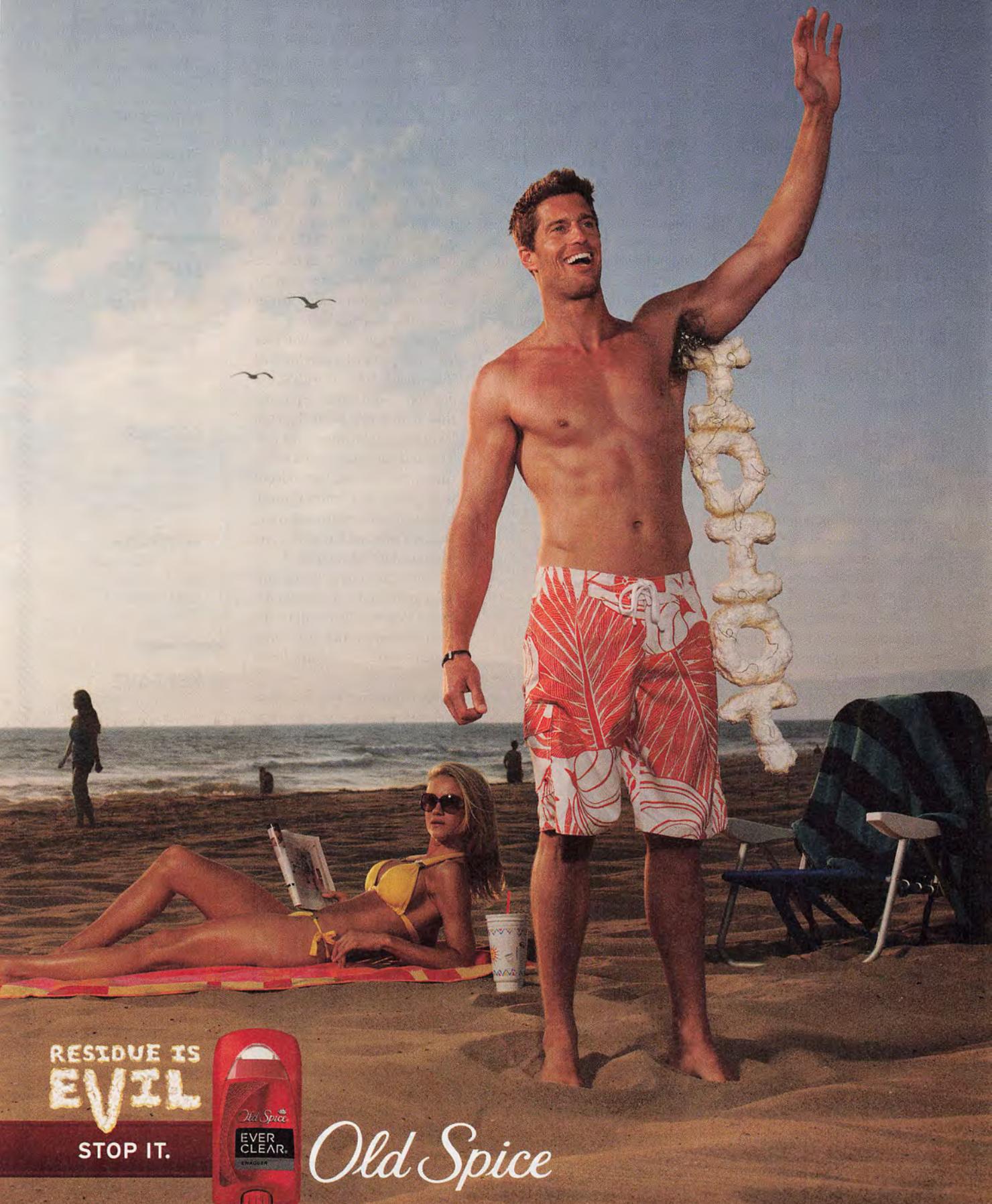
- 5 Arizona

KEY GAME

Aaron Corp's second collegiate start will come (gulp) in the Horseshoe before 102,000-plus fans looking for blood after last year's 35–3 bludgeoning by USC.

WORTH NOTING

Since Pete Carroll took over in 2001, USC is 32–1 in regular-season games played in November and December. The loss, a 13–9 setback to UCLA in 2006, kept the Trojans from making a third straight trip to the BCS championship game.



RESIDUE IS
EVIL
STOP IT.



Old Spice

5

VIRGINIA TECH

With a ramped-up ground game, the offense may finally hold up its end

IT'S SCARY to think what the Hokies could accomplish if they fielded even a respectable offense. Over the past three seasons they won 31 games and two ACC championships despite having an attack that ranked no better than 99th in the nation. Coach Frank Beamer built one of the most successful Division I-A programs—only Florida, Ohio State and Texas have more wins

than Beamer's teams over the last 14 years—around defense: The Hokies' unit ranked among the top seven every season since 2003. Beamerball may be a winner, but that doesn't mean it's pretty, or even fun to watch.

Darren Evans is intent on changing that. The 6-foot 213-pounder rushed for 1,265 yards and 11 touchdowns as a redshirt freshman in 2008. Not bad for a guy who started practice last fall fourth on the depth chart and who only got the starting job in the seventh game by virtue of being one of the last healthy backs. "The more snaps he took, he just became a force," says offensive coordinator Bryan Stinespring. "It was exciting to see that light come on for him."

IF THE LINE PERFORMS, IT WON'T MATTER WHO RUNS THE BALL.

Lining up with junior quarterback Tyrod Taylor (738 rushing yards), Evans will be the centerpiece of what should be a versatile running game—one that should get a boost from redshirt freshman Ryan Williams, a 5' 9", 205-pound bolt of lightning who wreaked havoc on the scout team last year. Clearing the way will be an experienced line led by senior left guard Sergio Render and senior left tackle Ed Wang. Says right tackle Blake DeChristopher, who started 11 games as a redshirt freshman last season, "If we do our job, it shouldn't matter who runs the ball."

The big question is whether Taylor, hyped as the next Michael Vick when he arrived in 2007, has developed as a passer. Splitting time with senior Sean Glennon last year, Taylor threw for two TDs and was intercepted seven times. Inexperience at wideout was partly to blame, though freshman starters Jarrett Boykin, Danny Coale and Dyrrell Roberts combined for 83 catches.

Still, with a punishing running game and a rock-solid defense, Virginia Tech will be the team to beat in the ACC—and maybe more. —Mark Beech

There is no questioning Taylor's running ability, but the career 55.7% passer has to cut down on interceptions.



Fast Facts

CONFERENCE: ACC

COACH: Frank Beamer (23rd year)

2008 RECORD: 10–4 (5–3 in ACC)

FINAL AP RANKING: 15

RETURNING

STARTERS: 15

Offense 8, Defense 7

SCHEDULE

SEPTEMBER

- 5 Alabama in Atlanta
- 12 Marshall
- 19 Nebraska
- 26 Miami

OCTOBER

- 3 at Duke
- 10 Boston College
- 17 at Georgia Tech
- 29 North Carolina

NOVEMBER

- 5 at East Carolina
- 14 at Maryland
- 21 N.C. State
- 28 at Virginia

KEY GAME

A victory in the Georgia Dome against the Crimson Tide would immediately stamp the Hokies as a national championship contender. Alabama has eight starters returning on defense, so points should be at a premium.

WORTH NOTING

Since Frank Beamer took over the program in 1987, the Virginia Tech defense has scored 79 touchdowns while the special teams have chipped in another 41.

my SI SI.com/virginiatech Get the latest and best Hokies stories, statistics and fan blogs from across the Web, handpicked by the editors of SI.



Evans, who didn't become the full-time starter until the seventh game in 2008, ran for more than 100 yards in four of his last six games.

6

OLE MISS

Can the Rebels live up to the hype of 2008's big wins over Florida and Texas Tech?

KENTRELL LOCKETT

could only frown while watching the BCS championship game last January. As Florida rolled over Oklahoma, the Ole Miss defensive end thought of his team's victory over the Gators at the Swamp three months earlier. "It was kind of disappointing," Lockett says of seeing Florida win it all. "What can they do that we couldn't do? Why not us?"

Lockett knew why. The stunning upset of the Gators was sandwiched between home losses to Vanderbilt and South Carolina, two schools that would finish 7-6. Championship teams don't lose such games. If the Rebels hope to live up to the hype produced by the win over Florida and a Cotton Bowl whipping of a Texas Tech team that entered the game 11-1, they'll have to be more consistent.

Quarterback Jevan Snead, wideout Dexter McCluster and coach Houston Nutt's Wild Rebel formation will get most of the attention, but to win its first SEC title since 1963, Mississippi will need better play from a defense that finished last in the conference against the pass

A LACK OF
CONSISTENT
PLAY IS THE
ONLY THING
HOLDING
THEM BACK.

(221.7 yards) in 2008. Week in and week out that unit has to maintain the degree of intensity it mustered in the wake of an emotional halftime at Alabama last October.

After Ole Miss allowed 24 first-half points to the second-ranked Crimson Tide, defensive tackle Peria Jerry and safety Jamarca Sanford lit into their teammates in the locker room. The Rebels didn't give up another point that day, and though their comeback fell short (Alabama won 24-20), they held their remaining opponents to 12.5 points per game as they won their last six.

Jerry and Sanford have moved on to the NFL, but the attitude they helped instill in the Ole Miss defense remains. Even senior defensive end Greg Hardy, a ferocious pass rusher long derided for taking plays off, has come around, says defensive coordinator Tyrone Nix. And there's depth up front in speedy ends Hardy, Lockett and Marcus Tillman, plus 300-pound tackles Ted Laurent, Lawon Scott and Jerrell Powe.

"We're really unsatisfied after last year," Lockett says. "We have more phenomenal feats to come." —A.S.

Hardy has 18½ sacks over two seasons, but the defensive end has to beat the rap that he takes plays off.



MATTHEW SHARPE/GETTY IMAGES

Fast Facts

CONFERENCE: SEC
COACH: Houston Nutt (2nd year)

2008 RECORD: 9-4 (5-3 in SEC)

FINAL AP RANK: 14

RETURNING

STARTERS: 14

Offense 6, Defense 8

SCHEDULE

SEPTEMBER

6 at Memphis
19 Southeastern Louisiana
24 at South Carolina

OCTOBER

3 at Vanderbilt
→ 10 Alabama
17 UAB
24 Arkansas
31 at Auburn

NOVEMBER

7 Northern Arizona
14 Tennessee
21 LSU
28 at Mississippi State

KEY GAME

Last fall Ole Miss nearly upset Alabama in Tuscaloosa, falling 24-20. To win the SEC West, the Rebels have to beat the Tide. Easier said than done. Alabama has won five straight in the series.

WORTH NOTING

Sure, Tennessee has won 12 straight over Ole Miss and has never lost in Oxford. But in the 61-game history the teams have met in Oxford three times, most recently in 2004. (Other sites: Knoxville, 29; Memphis, 23; Jackson six.)

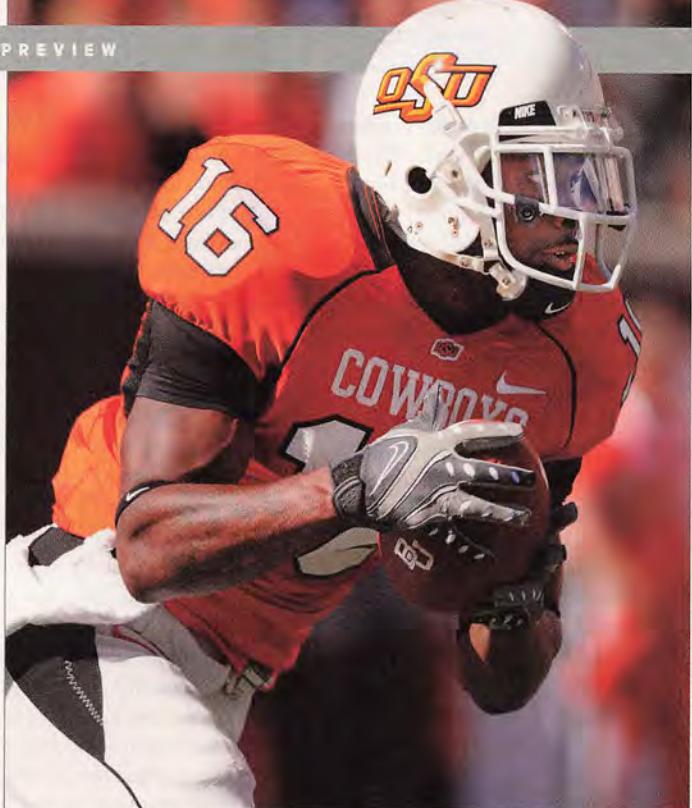
7

OKLAHOMA STATE

The Cowboys' defense doesn't have to be great—it just has to get better

IT'S NOT that Perrish Cox's considerable skills as a kick returner are unappreciated in Stillwater—he has, after all, taken back four kickoffs for touchdowns, one more than Heisman winner Barry Sanders did during his glorious career at Oklahoma State. It's just that, with an offense full of game-breakers, the Cowboys won't need the senior cornerback to score points as much as to help prevent them.

The attack is so prolific that the defense doesn't have to stop opponents cold, just hold them off a little better than it did last year, when Oklahoma State allowed 267.7 passing yards (ranking 109th among 119 Division I-A teams) and 28.1 points per game. If Cox, who made two interceptions last season and is the only starter back in the secondary, continues to develop into the shutdown corner that new defensive coordinator Bill Young thinks he can be, it will go a long way toward tightening up the D. "I want to keep doing my thing on special teams, but I'm putting defense first," Cox says. "There's no telling how far



The ball-hawking Cox wants to take his coverage skills to another level.

EXPECT MORE ZONE BLITZING IN A SMALLER BAG OF TRICKS.

we can go if we can improve on that side of the ball."

Coach Mike Gundy brought in Young, the third defensive coordinator in his five-year tenure, to oversee that improvement. Young, 63, has been an assistant at nine Division I-A schools, most recently at Miami last season, and he has a reputation for solidifying defenses by simplifying them. "As coaches, sometimes we tend to make the game more complicated than it needs to be," says Young, who took over after Tim Beckman left to become the coach at Toledo. "I'd like to see us do relatively few

things and do them well rather than try to throw every defense under the sun at people."

Expect more zone blitzing in Oklahoma State's manageable bag of tricks, after the Cowboys had only 15 sacks in 13 games last season (ranking 102nd in the nation). Young wants to put more pressure on the quarterback and reduce the amount of time the defensive backs have to stay in coverage. The rest is up to Cox and his fellow DBs, including cornerback Terrance Anderson and safeties Lucien Antoine and Victor Johnson.

Though the Cowboys primarily want Cox to elevate his overall pass defense, they're still counting on him to contribute in a variety of ways—as he did in a Holiday Bowl loss to Oregon last December with a blocked field goal attempt, a 43-yard kickoff return and an interception. "He can help a team in so many ways, you almost don't know where to start," says Gundy. For Oklahoma State, Cox has to start making more stops.

—PT.

Fast Facts

CONFERENCE: Big 12

COACH: Mike Gundy (5th year)

2008 RECORD: 9-4 (5-3 in Big 12)

FINAL AP RANK: 16

RETURNING

STARTERS: 14

Offense 8, Defense 6

SCHEDULE

SEPTEMBER

- 5 Georgia
- 12 Houston
- 19 Rice
- 26 Grambling State

OCTOBER

- 10 at Texas A&M
- 17 Missouri
- 24 at Baylor
- 31 Texas

NOVEMBER

- 7 at Iowa State
- 14 Texas Tech
- 19 Colorado
- 28 at Oklahoma

KEY GAME

Long before they tangle with the Longhorns and the Sooners, the Cowboys will get to see if they are ready to contend for the national title with a meeting against an SEC power.

WORTH NOTING

New defensive coordinator Bill Young is no stranger to Stillwater and the Big 12. Young was a linebacker and defensive end for the Cowboys in the mid-1960s, was an Oklahoma State assistant in the '70s and coordinated a Kansas defense that was 12th nationally in 2007.

8

ALABAMA

A green offensive line will be put to the test even before the season starts

THE CRIMSON TIDE must replace an Outland Trophy-winning left tackle (Andre Smith) and an All-SEC center (Antoine Caldwell). What's more, the revamped line must protect a first-year starter at quarterback (Greg McElroy) who has thrown all of 20 passes at Alabama. But the big men up front have a training tool that no other line in the country has: Terrence Cody.

"If we're not in perfect position to block him, then we don't really have a chance [of stopping him]," left guard Mike Johnson says of Mount Cody, the 6' 5" nosetackle who slimmed down from 380 pounds to 354 in the off-season. "That's what he does for us on a day-to-day basis. It was huge for us last year. It's going to be even bigger this year."

Cody's assistance is but a small part of the help the defense will be for an offense that will most likely need time to find its rhythm. With standouts Cody, linebacker Rolando McClain and cornerback Javier Arenas holding off the opposition, Alabama won't have to light up the scoreboard. But make no mistake. To win the strongest SEC West since the con-

ference split into two divisions in 1992, Alabama's offense will have to hold up its end.

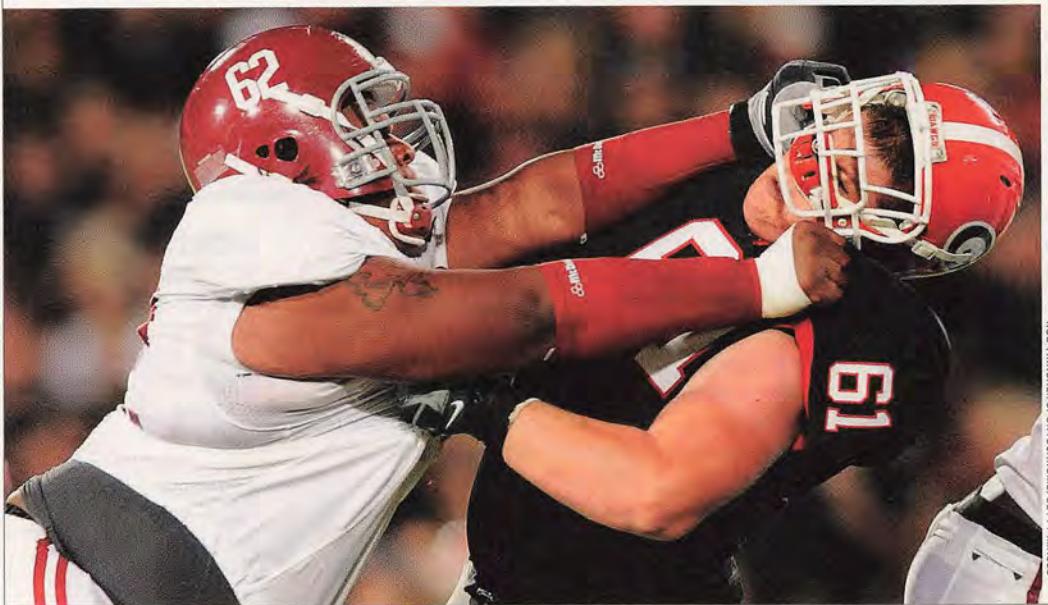
McElroy is a 6' 3", 220-pound junior from Southlake (Texas) Carroll High whose mobility should take some of the pressure off the line. In fact, Johnson says McElroy may remind Tide fans of another Texan. "He's got a Colt McCoy-type athleticism to him," Johnson says. "People are going to be surprised with the kind of plays he can make."

Of course, McElroy's success will be tied to the line's effectiveness. "Every question that you ask me about quarterback is going to come right back to this group," coach Nick Saban says of his blockers. Senior Drew Davis returns at right tackle; James Carpenter, a transfer from Coffeyville (Kans.) Community College, is the front-runner at left tackle, though all eyes will be on 6' 6", 340-pound D.J. Fluker, a prized freshman from Foley, Ala. Holding the edge at center is junior William Vlachos, who played in seven games in 2008. Why Vlachos? "He handled Terrence Cody pretty well all spring," Johnson says.

High praise indeed. —A.S.

THE OFFENSE WILL NEED TIME TO FIND ITS RHYTHM.

In practice the 354-pound Cody (62) gives his teammates a glimpse of what life is like in the SEC trenches.



Fast Facts

CONFERENCE: SEC

COACH: Nick Saban
(3rd year)

2008 RECORD: 12-2
(8-0 in SEC)

FINAL AP RANK: 6

RETURNING

STARTERS: 12

Offense 4, Defense 8

SCHEDULE

SEPTEMBER

- 5 Virginia Tech in Atlanta
- 12 Florida International
- 19 North Texas
- 26 Arkansas

OCTOBER

- 3 at Kentucky
- 10 at Ole Miss
- 17 South Carolina
- 24 Tennessee

NOVEMBER

- 7 LSU
- 14 at Mississippi State
- 21 Chattanooga
- 27 at Auburn

KEY GAME

The Crimson Tide set the tone for its 2008 breakout by thumping No. 9 Clemson in the Georgia Dome on the opening weekend. A victory over the Hokies, the ACC favorite, would be a huge boost.

WORTH NOTING

Alabama unloaded six years of Iron Bowl frustration on Auburn with a 36-0 win last season, but the Tide best beware when the teams tangle in November. The margin of victory was the largest in the series since 'Bama won 38-0 in 1962. Auburn won the next year, 10-8.

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9

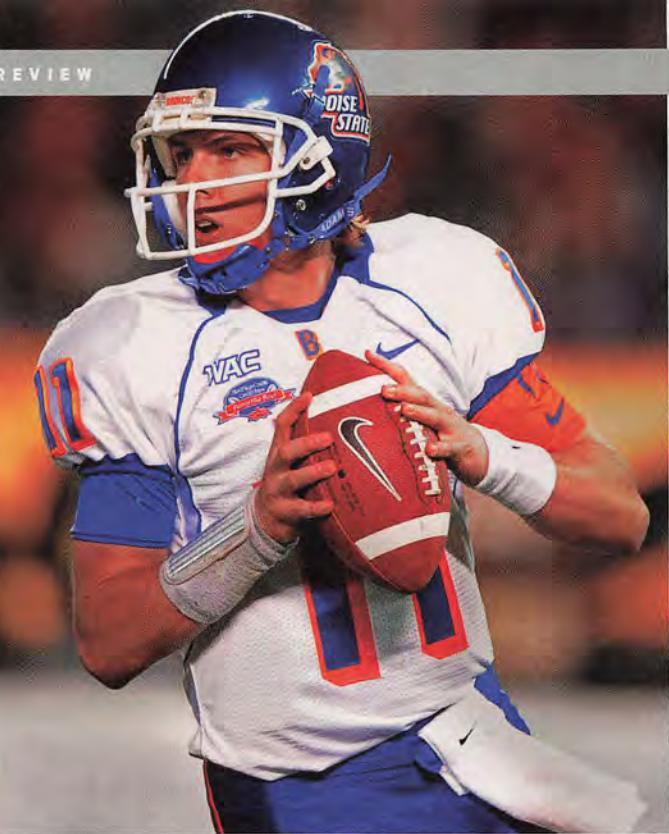
BOISE STATE

A little Moore goes a long way for the Broncos in their bid for a BCS berth

CHRIS PETERSEN needed a bit of convincing in 2007 before he offered a scholarship to Kellen Moore, an undersized, small-school quarterback from south central Washington. So the Boise State coach took one more look at Moore's game tape. "He's not your classic passer," Petersen says. "He's six feet tall. He's lefthanded. But when I studied him, I realized this guy completed a lot of passes."

Petersen also spoke with coaches whose teams had played against Moore, and they confirmed that the state's record holder for career touchdown passes (173) deserved a scholarship. But Petersen still wasn't sold—until Broncos defensive coordinator Justin Wilcox, the point man in Moore's recruitment, told Petersen, "If Kellen doesn't pan out for us, I'll give up one scholarship on defense. That's how strongly I feel about him."

Things have more than panned out for Moore and Boise State. As a redshirt freshman in 2008 he won the starting job in preseason camp and went on to pass for 3,486 yards and



KIRK LEWIS/WIPE OF SPORTS ILLUSTRATED

After 25 TD passes as a redshirt freshman, Moore's a seasoned sophomore.

MOORE WINS WITH HIS ACCURACY, SAVVY AND PATIENCE.

25 touchdowns, earning freshman All-America honors while leading the Broncos to the WAC title. With a great portion of the team back (of the 101 players listed on the Poinsettia Bowl roster, 77 were freshmen or sophomores), the Broncos have become the fashionable pick as 2009's most likely BCS buster.

No player will have a larger impact on the team's success than Moore, who at 187 pounds doesn't exactly intimidate defenses. "I have no other athletic ability," he says only half-jokingly. He instead beats teams with his accuracy (his 69.4%

completion rate ranked fifth in the nation), savvy (his father, Tom, was one of the most successful high school coaches in Washington) and patience. "He's just as happy hitting a four-yard flat route and letting the guy get a few extra yards as he is to launch it down the field," Petersen says.

During spring practice Moore, who was in the shotgun on about 60% of the snaps last year, spent more time under center in an effort by the coaches to improve a rushing offense that ranked 54th in the country. The staff also spent time filling holes on defense, which was the third toughest to score against (12.6 points per game) but lost six starters.

"If we take care of business like we're supposed to," Petersen says, as Boise State bids for its second BCS bowl in four years, "we'll be playing someone good at the end of the season, in a good location, and all of our guys will have smiles on their faces."

—Gene Menez

Fast Facts

CONFERENCE: WAC

COACH: Chris Petersen
(4th year)

2008 RECORD: 12–1
(8–0 in WAC)

FINAL AP RANK: 11

RETURNING STARTERS: 11

Offense 6, Defense 5

SCHEDULE

SEPTEMBER

- 3 Oregon
- 12 Miami (Ohio)
- 18 at Fresno State
- 26 at Bowling Green

OCTOBER

- 3 UC Davis
- 14 at Tulsa
- 24 at Hawaii
- 31 San Jose State

NOVEMBER

- 6 at Louisiana Tech
- 14 Idaho
- 20 at Utah State
- 27 Nevada

DECEMBER

- 5 New Mexico State

KEY GAME

Nothing like opening your bid for a BCS bowl against a loaded Oregon that is no doubt still smarting from the 37–32 loss that you pinned on the Ducks last year. At least the rematch is on the blue field.

WORTH NOTING

The Broncos have won at least 10 games in seven of the last nine years, and since the start of the 2000 season they rank second in Division I-A in victories with 98. Oklahoma leads with 102.



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10**OHIO STATE**

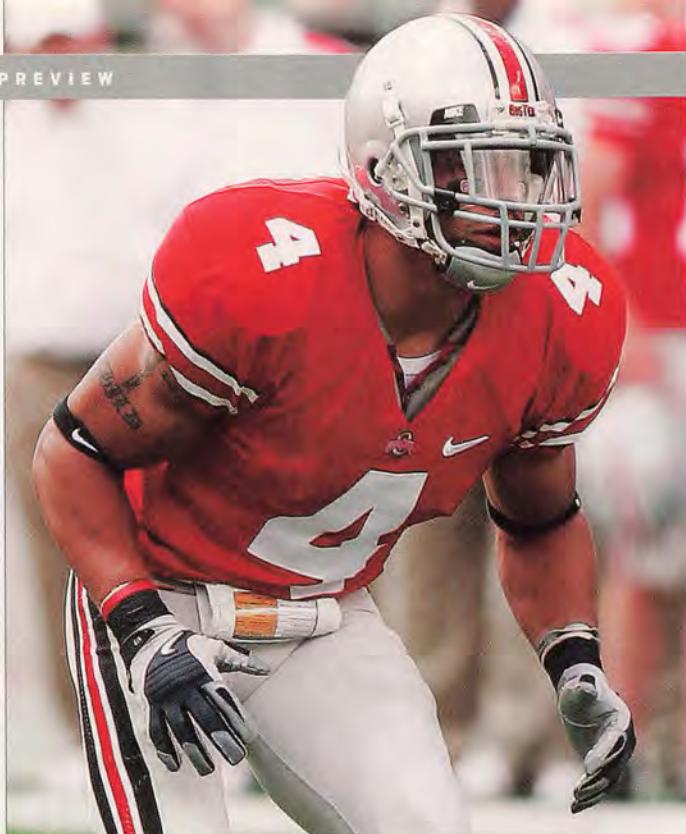
High turnover in the lineup isn't unusual, nor does it faze the perennial Big Ten power

SENIOR STRONG

safety Kurt Coleman has firsthand experience with the Buckeyes' ability to reload quickly. In 2007 he was one of six new starters on a defense that lifted Ohio State from fifth in the nation in scoring defense in '06 to first. "Obviously, our coaches don't just get the starters ready to play," Coleman says.

Overall, 23 Buckeyes were taken in the 2005 through '08 NFL drafts, yet the program has hardly missed a beat: Ohio State has won at least 10 games in each of the last four years, played for the national championship twice and been to two other BCS bowls. This annual rite of rejuvenation is the primary reason why, despite the loss of 11 starters from the 2008 team, Ohio State is the pick to win its fifth straight Big Ten title. (The Buckeyes shared the crown with Penn State in '05 and '08.)

The 5' 11", 188-pound Coleman, a ferocious hitter, led the Buckeyes with four interceptions last season and is the team's top returning tackler. Coleman, who finished with



AARON JOSEFCZYK/CONTRIBUTOR

The top returning tackler, Coleman is prepared to lead the defense.

—
PRYOR HAS TO ADJUST TO SEVEN NEW OFFENSIVE STARTERS.
—

double-digit tackles in each of the Buckeyes' final three games last season, will have to take charge of a defense that lost a pair of All-America playmakers in cornerback Malcolm Jenkins and middle linebacker James Laurinaitis.

Help will come from a defensive line that has three of four starters back and, after finishing 18th in the country against the run last year, the potential to be dominant again. For example, what 6' 2", 240-pound junior end Thaddeus Gibson lacks in size, he makes up for with quick feet

and a motor that doesn't stop; the converted linebacker led Ohio State with five sacks last season. The experienced line should take pressure off senior middle linebacker Austin Spitler, who after spending four years as the understudy to Laurinaitis finally gets his shot. "He really hasn't played a game yet," says defensive coordinator Jim Heacock. "But he's very intense and tough, like [Laurinaitis], and seems to be seizing the opportunity."

The entire defense will have to be primed from the get-go while sophomore quarterback Terrelle Pryor adjusts to seven new starters on offense. Among the newcomers to the lineup is 5' 10", 193-pound sophomore tailback Daniel (Boom) Herron, who has a running style to match his nickname. That's a good thing because USC is coming to Columbus on Sept. 12. A victory over the Trojans would set the stage for the Buckeyes' run at a third BCS Championship Game appearance in four years. —M.B.

Fast Facts

CONFERENCE: Big Ten

COACH: Jim Tressel
(9th year)

2008 RECORD: 10-3
(7-1 in Big Ten)

FINAL AP RANK: 9

RETURNING

STARTERS: 11

Offense 4, Defense 7

SCHEDULE

SEPTEMBER

5 Navy
12 USC
19 Toledo
in Cleveland
26 Illinois

OCTOBER

3 at Indiana
10 Wisconsin
17 at Purdue
24 Minnesota
31 New Mexico State

NOVEMBER

→ 7 at Penn State
14 Iowa
21 at Michigan

KEY GAME

The Nittany Lions walked out of the Horseshoe last year with a 13-6 victory and kept the Buckeyes from claiming an outright Big Ten title. The stakes figure to be just as high when the teams square off in Happy Valley.

WORTH NOTING

The secret to Ohio State's success under Jim Tressel? In the past four seasons the Buckeyes haven't ranked lower than sixth nationally in scoring defense. Last year they gave up 13.9 points per game and finished sixth.

Herron, who rushed for 439 yards despite only two starts as a freshman, has a nickname that speaks to his running style: Boom.



11

OREGON

The Ducks' fortunes are in the hands of four new starters on the offensive line

OF COURSE it's fun to focus on the amusement-park aspects of the Oregon offense: the trick plays with names like 71 Stogie Switch, the triple options, the double passes, and the pitches to, of all people, tight end Ed Dickson. "When everything's falling into place and we move the ball, it's a ton of fun," says junior right tackle C.E. Kaiser.

All the bells and whistles and gaudy statistics from last year (41.9 points and 280.1 rushing yards per game, for starters) tend to obscure the fact that the show run by quarterback-ringmaster Jeremiah Masoli is predicated on five brutes winning battles along the line of scrimmage.

In Masoli, Dickson and running back LeGarrette Blount the Ducks boast some of the nation's most dangerous skill-position players. But here is the rub: Gone from last year's 10-win squad are four starters from the line, three of whom—center Max Unger (second round, Seahawks), left tackle Fenuki Tupou (fifth round, Eagles) and right guard Mark Lewis (free agent, Dolphins)—are now in the NFL.



ERIC EVANS PHOTOGRAPHY

Holmes moves over to center after making four starts at guard in 2008.

"WHEN WE MOVE THE BALL," SAYS KAISER, "IT'S A TON OF FUN."

How their replacements fare will largely determine whether the Ducks exceed or fall short of expectations.

Kaiser (6' 4", 290 pounds) started 10 games last season and is the team's most experienced returnee—and potentially its most devastating run blocker. Last year he broke a 16-year-old school record, power-cleaning 374 pounds. Alongside him will be right guard Mark Asper (6' 7", 323), a sophomore with excellent feet and only one college start. But Asper is a hard-boiled veteran compared with baby-faced redshirt freshman

Carson York (6' 5", 285), who is expected to take over at left guard. The new left tackle is Bo Thran (6' 5", 295), a junior who made four of his five career starts at guard. They'll all be taking signals from center Jordan Holmes (6' 5", 285), another junior whose four starts have come at guard.

Don't panic, Duck Nation. You have a tremendous resource in Steve Greatwood, who last season was voted the nation's top offensive line coach by his peers. While his guys may not have many starts, Greatwood says they have plenty of "experience in the system." Another slight edge: When Masoli is the ballcarrier—which is often—it frees up a running back to be an extra blocker, making it easier for the Ducks to get "a hat on a hat," says Greatwood.

"We're not as big or as strong as last year," says Holmes, "but we're quick and we're smart and we're mean. As soon as we get our communication down, we'll be good to go." —A.M.

Fast Facts

CONFERENCE: Pac-10

COACH: Chip Kelly
(1st year)

2008 RECORD: 10–3
(7–2 in Pac-10)

FINAL AP RANK: 10

RETURNING

STARTERS: 10
Offense 5, Defense 5

SCHEDULE

SEPTEMBER

3 at Boise State
12 Purdue
19 Utah
26 Cal

OCTOBER

3 Washington State
10 at UCLA
24 at Washington
→ 31 USC

NOVEMBER

7 at Stanford
14 Arizona State
21 at Arizona

DECEMBER

3 Oregon State

KEY GAME

In what could be the Pac-10's game of the year, USC will spend Halloween in Eugene. Scary fact: The Trojans haven't won in the state of Oregon since 2005.

WORTH NOTING

QBs Justin Roper and Chris Harper left the program in the spring, leaving the backup job to sophomore Darron Thomas. Against Boise State last September, Thomas, with 210 passing yards and three TDs in the fourth quarter, almost rallied the Ducks from a 24-point deficit.



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12

GEORGIA TECH

The Jackets get behind their bruising ballcarrier for a run at ACC supremacy

THE WORDS were delivered in a calm yet commanding voice. "We get the ball first in the second half," Georgia Tech coach Paul Johnson told his players at halftime of their Nov. 29 game at Georgia in which they trailed 28–12. "We will score on that possession, and that will change everything." A few minutes later, on the Yellow Jackets' first snap after intermission, quarterback Josh Nesbitt tossed the ball to Jonathan Dwyer on an option play, and the 6-foot, 235-pound running back broke three tackles while galloping 60 yards down the right sideline for a touchdown. From there, Georgia Tech went on to beat the Bulldogs 45–42, snapping a seven-game losing streak to its rival. And Dwyer, who rushed for 144 yards that day, showed the SEC what coaches and players in the ACC already knew: He's as hard to bring down as any running back in the country.

"Jonathan has great lower-body strength, and that makes him very difficult to tackle," says Brian Bohannon, the Yellow Jackets' quarterbacks and running backs coach. "Plus, for a 235-



PAUL ABELL/US PRESSWIRE

Nesbitt won't throw much, but he averaged 15 yards a completion in '08.

Dwyer is as hard to stop as any back in the country.

pound guy, he can run as well as anyone. We have big, big expectations for him this season."

Indeed, for his team to have a shot at getting into a BCS bowl, Dwyer, who was the ACC offensive player of the year as a sophomore in 2008 (with a conference-high 1,395 rushing yards), will have to contribute another monster season. But the entire offense—with nine returning starters—has to kick Johnson's option-based spread attack into a higher gear this season, the coach's second in Atlanta after six years at Navy. Though Georgia Tech ranked

fourth in the country in rushing last year, big adjustments had to be made: For instance, the entire starting line had been recruited by Johnson's predecessor, Chan Gailey, to play a pro-style offense.

"There's no comparison between last year and this year in terms of how much more comfortable we are with this offense," Dwyer says. "Instead of thinking about everything we do, we're just playing. We're clicking as a unit, and that makes you play faster on the field."

Dwyer, from Marietta, Ga., turned down scholarship offers from Florida, Georgia and South Carolina to attend Tech. In what could be his final college season—barring a setback, he is viewed by many scouts as a first-round pick in next year's NFL draft—Dwyer believes that the Yellow Jackets can win their first national title since 1990. "If we keep improving like we did during the spring," he says, "we can shock the country."

—Lars Anderson

Fast Facts

CONFERENCE: ACC

COACH: Paul Johnson (2nd year)

2008 RECORD: 9–4 (5–3 in ACC)

FINAL AP RANK: 22

RETURNING

STARTERS: 17

Offense 9, Defense 8

SCHEDULE

SEPTEMBER

5 Jacksonville State
10 Clemson
17 at Miami
26 North Carolina

OCTOBER

3 at Mississippi State
10 at Florida State
→ 17 Virginia Tech
24 at Virginia
31 at Vanderbilt

NOVEMBER

7 Wake Forest
14 at Duke
28 Georgia

KEY GAME

If the Yellow Jackets, who lost to the Hokies 20–17 last season in Blacksburg, can win this slugfest, they should be in good position to take their first Coastal Division championship since 2006.

WORTH NOTING

Last year Georgia Tech ranked ahead of only three Division I-A teams in passing, averaging 99.2 yards on a meager 12.7 attempts per game. Expect the Yellow Jackets to throw more this season to keep opponents from stacking the box with nine defenders.



SI.com/georgiatech Get the latest and best Yellow Jackets stories, statistics and fan blogs from across the Web, handpicked by the editors of SI.



Dwyer, who rushed for 1,395 yards last year, says of the offense, "We're clicking as a unit, and that makes you play faster."

13

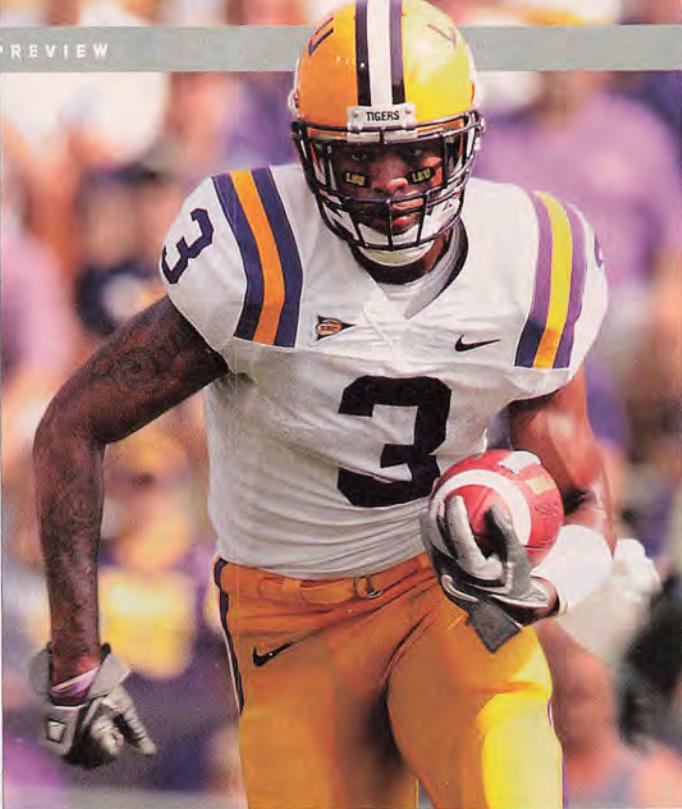
LSU

Once an SEC rival, the new coordinator shakes up an impulsive defense

AS HE BEGAN to overhaul a defense that surrendered 325.5 yards a game and allowed at least 30 points five times last season, defensive coordinator John Chavis set the tone for LSU's new look with two off-season meetings in his office.

First, Chavis told Chad Jones that his days as a nickelback were over; the Tigers needed the 6'3", 214-pound junior to start at free safety. "I had a serious face on," says Jones, a reliever and reserve outfielder on LSU's 2009 national championship baseball team. "But I was smiling on the inside." Jones spent his first two seasons playing on obvious passing downs, but Chavis, who moved to LSU last January after 14 years as the coordinator at Tennessee, saw a human Swiss Army knife who can make plays from sideline to sideline. "He's got as much range as anyone I've seen," Chavis says.

Next, Chavis told senior Harry Coleman, who led LSU in tackles as the starting strong safety in 2008, that he had lost his job and would have to compete for playing time at outside linebacker. The coach explained that with



GREG NELSON

Jones will be asked to cover a lot of ground as the new free safety.

"OUR DEFENSE IS . . . HUNGRY," SAYS BLACK. "THEY'RE MAD."

a deep secondary, he could best use the versatile Coleman at linebacker. Chavis braced for the worst, but Coleman told the coach he would do whatever he could to make the Tigers better. And with his performance in spring practice, the 6'2", 205-pound Coleman made a case for getting significant playing time at his new position. Chavis now has a hybrid linebacker who can cover receivers, giving the coordinator more flexibility to disguise blitzes and coverages, a trademark of his Tennessee defenses. "Some of those things will keep the offense guessing," Chavis says. "You have

to be multiple in this league. If you're not, the offense will start dictating to you."

But the transformation of the defense is about more than schemes. Coach Les Miles says it has undergone "a significant culture change"—from passive and predictable to aggressive and ever-changing. Senior left tackle Ciron Black, who has started 40 consecutive games, agrees. "Our defense looks unbelievable," he says. "They're hungry. They're fired up. They're mad."

Given the fact that in recent years they have recruited some of the SEC's best athletes, the Tigers, just two seasons removed from a national championship, could climb back into title contention this fall. But Miles is well aware that his team will be in for a fight every week. "I don't think that big tiger lies in the weeds," Miles says. "Everybody knows when they're playing us."

Chavis's job is to make sure opponents still feel that way after they have tangled with his defense. —A.S.

Fast Facts

CONFERENCE: SEC

COACH: Les Miles

(5th year)

2008 RECORD: 8–5

(3–5 in SEC)

FINAL AP RANK: NR

RETURNING

STARTERS: 13

Offense 7, Defense 6

SCHEDULE

SEPTEMBER

- 5 at Washington
- 12 Vanderbilt
- 19 Louisiana-Lafayette
- 26 at Mississippi State

OCTOBER

- 3 at Georgia
- 10 Florida
- 24 Auburn
- 31 Tulane

NOVEMBER

- 7 at Alabama
- 14 Louisiana Tech
- 21 at Ole Miss
- 28 Arkansas

KEY GAME

A victory would give LSU a surge of confidence heading into the teeth of its SEC schedule. The Tigers haven't won in Athens since 1987, though they've played there only three times since.

WORTH NOTING

What happened to Death Valley? Last season the Tigers dropped three home games—their most since they lost four times in Baton Rouge in 1999—and gave up 52 points to Georgia, the most scored by a visitor since Florida racked up 58 in 1993.

14

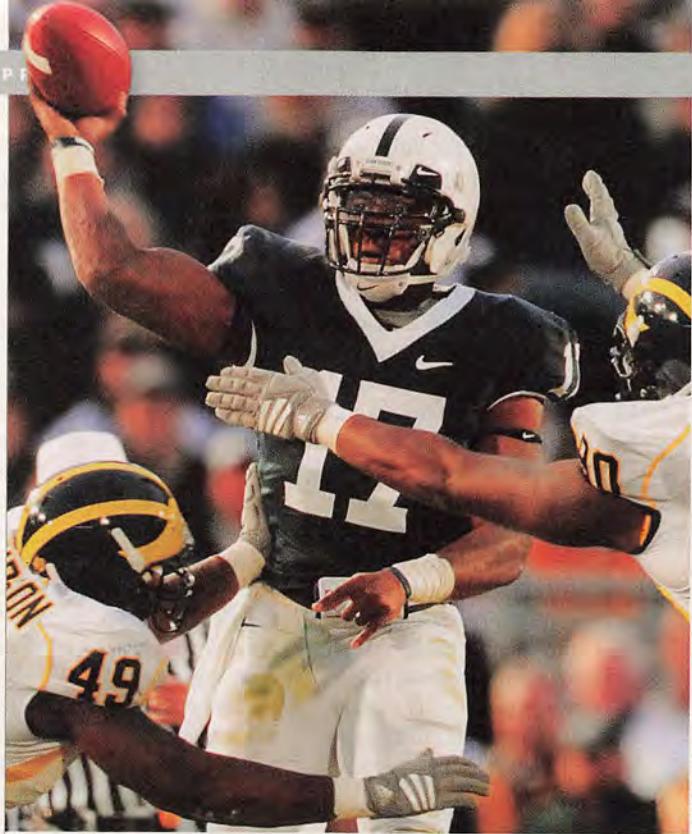
PENN STATE

With top playmakers gone, the QB and the linebackers are the show

THIS IS Daryll Clark's team now. After watching from the sideline for the better part of two seasons, taking only 36 snaps, he emerged last year as one of the most dangerous option quarterbacks in the country. The 6' 2" 233-pounder produced 2,874 yards of total offense, passed or ran for 29 touchdowns, seldom made a bad decision and managed the offense brilliantly as Penn State scored a Big Ten-best 38.9 points per game, had 11 wins and went to the Rose Bowl. Clark enters his senior year a Heisman Trophy candidate.

But with the departure of the most prolific trio of wideouts in school history, there's concern in Happy Valley about the potency of the vaunted Spread HD. The top four receivers on the depth chart following spring practice combined for 29 catches last season. More than mistake-free football, the Nittany Lions need Clark to be a playmaker. "Daryll is able to assert himself now because he knows he's the Guy," says quarterbacks coach Jay Paterno. "He's so much more confident."

Clark, who completed almost 60% of his passes in 2008, gets a



DAVID BERGMAN

Clark, a 59.8% passer in '08, will be exercising his legs more in '09.

HALL MIGHT FLANK ONE OR BOTH BACKS AS RECEIVERS.

boost from two backs who combined for 1,814 rushing yards last season: 6' 1", 209-pound Evan Royster, a smooth runner with great hands, and 5' 10", 192-pound flash Stephfon Green, who has clocked a 4.25 in the 40. Offensive coordinator Galen Hall has hinted that he might flank one or both of his backs as receivers to create different looks and exploit matchups. Hall also plans to ease the burden on his young line—only center Stefen Wisniewski, moving over from right guard, and right tackle Dennis Landolt return—by spreading the field. "The talent is there, on

the line and at receiver," insists Clark. "The only thing those guys are lacking is experience."

The same could be said for a defense that has only four starters back (none in the secondary), so Linebacker U will be relying on—what else?—its linebackers. Junior Navorro Bowman, a 6' 1", 230-pound hitting machine who mans the weak side, didn't crack the starting lineup until the fourth game last year but still earned All-Big Ten honors. He'll be joined by fifth-year senior Sean Lee, the conference's second-leading tackler two seasons ago who missed all of 2008 with a torn right ACL, and either sophomore Michael Mauti, who drew raves in the spring, or Josh Hull, a 6' 3", 236-pound senior who was second on the team in tackles last year while filling in for Lee.

While the defense settles in, the offense would do well to score early and often. "There are probably a lot of people counting us out," Clark says, "but the guys we need to step up will step up. I guarantee it." —M.B.

Fast Facts

CONFERENCE: Big Ten

COACH: Joe Paterno (44th year)

2008 RECORD: 11–2 (7–1 in Big Ten)

FINAL AP RANK: 8

RETURNING STARTERS: 8

Offense 4, Defense 4

SCHEDULE

SEPTEMBER

5 Akron

12 Syracuse

19 Temple

→ 26 Iowa

OCTOBER

3 at Illinois

10 Eastern Illinois

17 Minnesota

24 at Michigan

31 at Northwestern

NOVEMBER

7 Ohio State

14 Indiana

21 at Michigan State

KEY GAME

By avenging their lone conference defeat of 2008, the Nittany Lions would be well-positioned to cruise through their Big Ten schedule until facing Ohio State and Michigan State. The Hawkeyes have won six of the last seven in the series.

WORTH NOTING

Though he is one of only four starters back on offense, junior Evan Royster is the top returning rusher in the Big Ten. Royster ran for 1,236 yards, averaged 6.5 yards a carry and scored 12 touchdowns in 2008.

15

GEORGIA

Replace the QB who was the first pick in the draft? No problem. Joe Cox is ready

AT THE END of spring practice Georgia coach Mark Richt summoned each of his players to his office for a one-on-one. Among other things, the coach discussed the player's strengths and weaknesses, and at the end of every chat he asked the question, Who do you think is the leader of our team? All told, 106 players named quarterback Joe Cox, a fifth-year senior who has started

only one game for the Bulldogs.

"There's not a player or coach on this team who doesn't have confidence in him and what he can do on the field," Richt says. "He gives us peace of mind."

Indeed, the biggest story in Athens this spring was how Cox took command of the team. Unlike last season, when Georgia had a high-powered offense led by Matthew Stafford, the first pick in the NFL draft, this year's unit will operate a ball-control attack. Richt believes Cox will excel at game management. In other words, don't expect the new QB to throw many interceptions or make mental mistakes such as missing a protection call. Cox doesn't possess Stafford's arm strength, but he is a deadly accu-

rate short- to intermediate-range passer and can make plays with his feet (something Stafford rarely did).

"I've been in the program a long time, and I've learned a lot from the sideline," Cox says. "I'm ready to take charge."

Cox already is a proven winner who knows a thing or two about replacing a star. After taking over for highly touted Chris Leak at Independence High in Charlotte, Cox led the Patriots to a 31-0 record and back-to-back state titles, throwing a state-record 66 touchdown passes as a senior. Cox's most memorable moment at Georgia occurred in 2006, when he replaced a struggling Stafford with the Bulldogs trailing Colorado 13-0 late in the third quarter; Cox completed 10 of 13 passes for 154 yards and two touchdowns to rally his team to a 14-13 victory.

"Everyone knows what Joe is capable of," says junior linebacker Rennie Curran. "We honestly don't think there's going to be a drop-off at quarterback."

If there isn't, Georgia will be right back in the middle of the SEC title race. —L.A.

Though Cox has thrown only 58 passes at Georgia, teammates believe he'll point them in the right direction.

"I'VE LEARNED A LOT FROM THE SIDELINE," SAYS COX.

Fast Facts

CONFERENCE: SEC

COACH: Mark Richt
(9th year)

2008 RECORD: 10-3
(6-2 in SEC)

FINAL AP RANK: 13

RETURNING

STARTERS: 13

Offense 7, Defense 6

SCHEDULE

SEPTEMBER

- 5 at Oklahoma State
- 12 South Carolina
- 19 at Arkansas
- 26 Arizona State

OCTOBER

- 3 LSU
- 10 at Tennessee
- 17 at Vanderbilt
- 31 Florida
- in Jacksonville

NOVEMBER

- 7 Tennessee Tech
- 14 Auburn
- 21 Kentucky
- 28 at Georgia Tech

KEY GAME

Quarterback Joe Cox will be tested immediately as the Bulldogs travel to Stillwater in one of the marquee matchups of the opening weekend. The Cowboys will have three new starters in the secondary, so Georgia should have big-play opportunities.

WORTH NOTING

While the Bulldogs may be young this season, they won't lack for experience. No fewer than 21 freshmen logged playing time in 2008 for a team that started the year ranked No. 1 in the country.



CURTIS COMPTON/THE ATLANTA JOURNAL-CONSTITUTION/AP

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The Bulldogs have a sure-handed wide receiver in A.J. Green, who had 56 receptions and eight touchdowns as a freshman.



16**FLORIDA STATE**

Loaded on offense, the Seminoles see an end to their three-year ACC title drought

SITTING IN the student section of Doak S. Campbell Stadium last Sept. 20, Dekoda Watson was sure of one thing: He wasn't coming back to Tallahassee in 2009 for his senior season. Watson, a linebacker from Aiken, S.C., was serving a suspension for academic misconduct, and as he watched his teammates lose to Wake Forest—Florida State's third consecutive loss in the

series—it was painfully clear that the Seminoles' long dominance of the ACC was over. The program that had won 12 outright or shared conference championships in 14 years (1992 through 2005) hasn't advanced to the ACC title game in three seasons.

"When I was in the student section, I saw us make so many mistakes it just hurt," Watson says. "I won't lie, I wanted to leave. But you know what? I've never won a ring, and the more I looked around [after the '08 season], the more I started to believe that this could be our year in the ACC."

Indeed, though the schedule is brutal—11 of 12 opponents played in bowls last season—the Seminoles should be the class of the

ALL BUT ONE OPPONENT PLAYED IN A BOWL IN '08.

Coming off of elbow surgery, Watson (36) will step into a leading role on the Seminoles defense.

ACC Atlantic. With eight starters back on offense, including junior quarterback Christian Ponder and all five linemen, the onus is on the defense to come through. The top three tacklers from 2008 have departed, so it's understandable why defensive coordinator Mickey Andrews was relieved to hear that Watson was returning after all. "Dekoda is our leader," Andrews says. "He's going to be a disruptive force."

Watson played in the last 10 games, including a 42–13 whipping of Wisconsin in the Champ Sports Bowl, and occasionally flashed playmaking skills that recalled past star Florida State linebackers Derrick Brooks and Peter Boulware. Despite being hampered by a sore hamstring and an injured left elbow that required Tommy John surgery in the off-season, the 6'2", 226-pound Watson had eight tackles for losses and finished fourth on the team in tackles with 46.

"It's time for us to bring back the glory to Florida State," says Watson, who might have been a second- or third-round pick in April's NFL draft. "That's why I came back." —L.A.



Fast Facts

CONFERENCE: ACC

COACH: Bobby Bowden (34th year)

2008 RECORD: 9–4 (5–3 in ACC)

FINAL AP RANK: 21

RETURNING

STARTERS: 13

Offense 8, Defense 5

SCHEDULE

SEPTEMBER

7 Miami

12 Jacksonville State

→ 19 at BYU

26 South Florida

OCTOBER

3 at Boston College

10 Georgia Tech

22 at North Carolina

31 N.C. State

NOVEMBER

7 at Clemson

14 at Wake Forest

21 Maryland

28 at Florida

KEY GAME

Florida State's young defense will be challenged by Cougars quarterback Max Hall, who last season led a BYU offense that finished sixth in the nation in passing with 310.4 yards per game.

WORTH NOTING

One of the Seminoles' strengths is an offensive line that features three players who were freshman All-Americans—sophomore left tackle Andrew Datko, junior center Ryan McMahon and junior left guard Rodney Hudson, now a Lombardi Award candidate.



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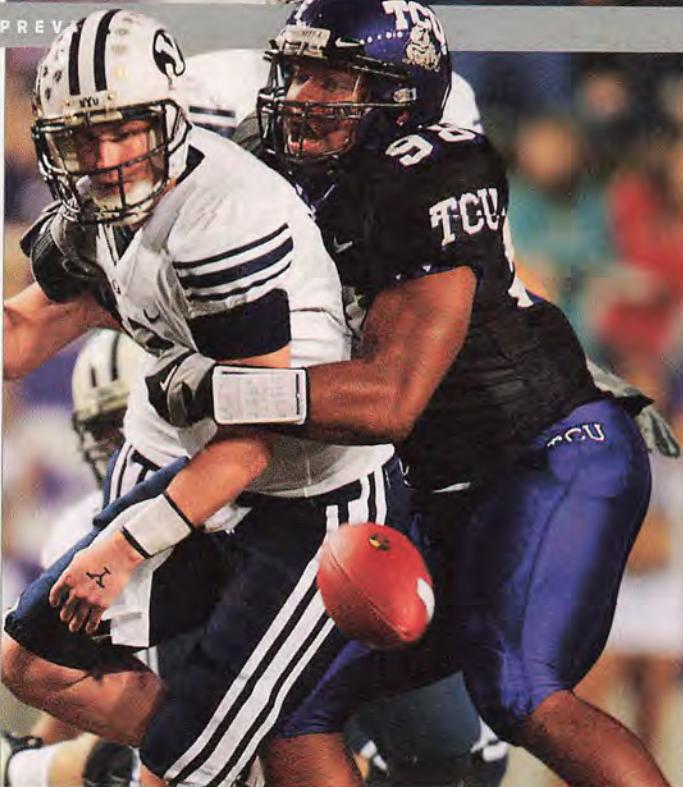
TCU

The Frogs are primed to finish on top in the annual Mountain West slugfest

FOR ONE hour in early June, quarterback Andy Dalton and defensive end Jerry Hughes were captivated by the words of retired coach Lou Holtz. They listened as Holtz, now a well-traveled motivational speaker when he's not providing analysis on ESPN, shouted advice on how to become a champion: *Work hard. Set goals. Ask yourself, What's important now?* With Holtz's recorded speech concluded and his message absorbed, Dalton pushed the eject button on the CD player in his SUV, and the players returned to the quiet solitude of a dark Texas highway late at night. "The big thing Coach Holtz emphasized was, What's important now?" Dalton recalls.

What's important now for the Horned Frogs is to finally get to a BCS bowl. Despite five seasons with 10 or more wins and a Mountain West title in 2005, they've yet to get a bid. (Utah is the only MWC team to be awarded one—in 2004 and '08.)

With 13 starters back from a team that went 11–2 and ranked seventh in the nation (both losses were to top 10 teams), TCU has a shot to be this season's Utah—if it



GREG NELSON

After leading the nation in sacks, Hughes wants to take down a BCS bid.

TCU'S HAD THE NO. 1 DEFENSE THREE TIMES SINCE 2000.

get can past the Utes and BYU in another Mountain West scramble. The most significant player back is Hughes, a 6' 3", 257-pound attacking left end who had a breakout season as a junior in 2008 with a nation's best 15 sacks and six forced fumbles. After rushing for 1,412 yards and 19 TDs in his senior year at Sugar Land (Texas) Austin High, Hughes signed with TCU intending to play running back. But on the day freshmen reported in 2006, he was assigned jersey number 98. "I knew then," Hughes says, "that my running back days were kind of numbered."

The move has worked out well for the Horned Frogs and Hughes, who has the quickness to beat tackles off the edge and the agility to drop into coverage when the coaches call one of their favorite zone blitzes. Led by Hughes, TCU ranked No. 1 in the country in total defense (217.8 yards per game) last season, the third time in nine years it has led that category. "I think we have a chance to be a faster team defensively," coach Gary Patterson says. "But I don't know if we can be as good because some of the guys who just graduated had been playing together for four years."

If the defense needs time to gather itself, the offense shouldn't miss a beat coming off a season in which it set school records for points (437) and touchdowns (56). The Frogs bring back six of their seven top rushers, two starting receivers, three linemen and Dalton, who is 17–6 as a starter.

They all understand what's important now: shedding that BCS monkey. —G.M.

Fast Facts

CONFERENCE: MWC

COACH: Gary Patterson
(9th year)

2008 RECORD: 11–2

(7–1 in MWC)

FINAL AP RANK: 7

RETURNING

STARTERS: 10

Offense 6, Defense 4

SCHEDULE

SEPTEMBER

12 at Virginia
19 Texas State
26 at Clemson

OCTOBER

3 SMU
10 at Air Force
17 Colorado State
24 at BYU
31 UNLV

NOVEMBER

7 at San Diego State
→ 14 Utah
21 at Wyoming
28 New Mexico

KEY GAME

The Horned Frogs can make a BCS statement with victories at Virginia and Clemson, but the first priority should be winning the Mountain West. Utah has beaten TCU three straight times and five of the last six.

WORTH NOTING

Call them Big 12 busters. The Frogs were left out when schools from the Southwest Conference (of which TCU had been a member since 1923) and the Big Eight formed the Big 12 in 1996. But since joining the MWC in 2005, TCU is 5–2 against Big 12 programs.

18

OREGON STATE

Defensive pride drives the Beavers' run at their first Rose Bowl bid in 44 years

WHAT OREGON STATE'S

3–0 shutout of Pittsburgh in last year's Brut(al) Sun Bowl lacked in style points, it made up for in sweet redemption for the Beavers' defense. In its previous outing the unit had allowed 694 yards in a 65–38 home loss to Oregon, a rout that cost Oregon State its first Rose Bowl berth since 1965. Instead of sulking, the players used the

Sun Bowl, says defensive coordinator Mark Banker, "to show the world who they were."

Who are they? Well, entering the fifth season of Mike Riley's second tour as coach, the Beavers are coming off the best three-year stretch in school history—28 wins, including three in bowls. That success would appear to be threatened by the loss of eight starters from a defense that was second in the Pac-10 in sacks, limited No. 1 USC to 86 yards rushing in the biggest upset of the year and finished 23rd in the nation in total defense (despite that no-show in the Civil War). But anyone who saw Oregon State's D at the final spring scrimmage knows this unit should be fine in '09.

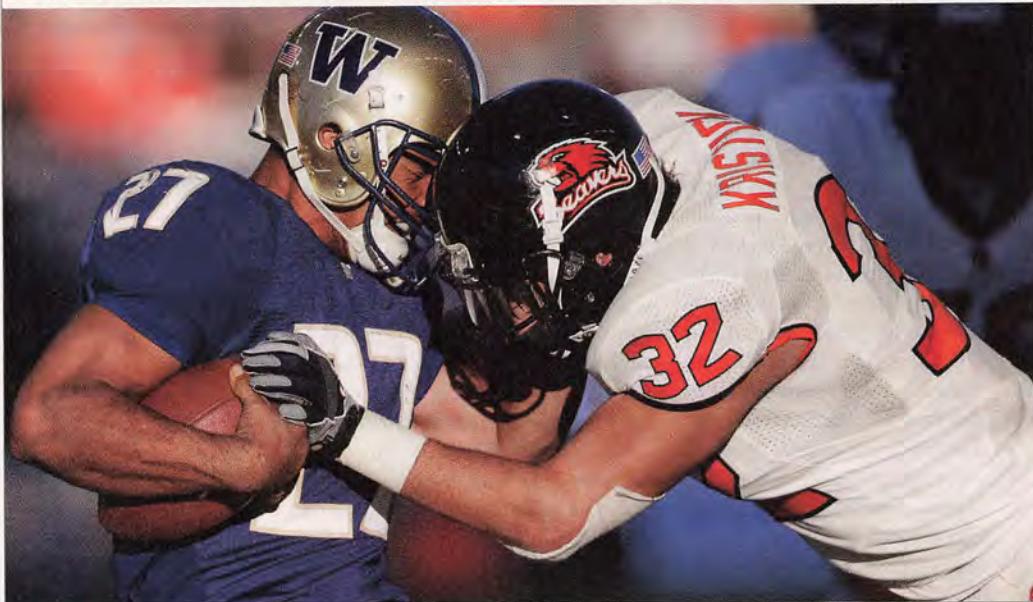
No Beaver had a better spring than senior Keaton Kristick, the fleet, instinctive strongside linebacker who, like most of his fellow 'backers, seems a tad light (6' 3", 230) for that position. To counter spread attacks, however, Banker prefers speed over strength and bulk. Kristick was a high school tailback. Weakside linebacker Dwight Roberson (6 feet, 231) ran the 100 meters in high school. Sophomore David Pa'aluhii III, a recreational kickboxer who is moving from outside to middle linebacker, goes 5' 11", 233 and has run the 40 in 4.48.

On the subject of speedy sophomores, the Quizz Show is back for its second season in Corvallis. Super quick Jacquizz Rodgers finished last season with 1,291 yards rushing and became the first freshman to be named Pac-10 offensive player of the year. The Quizz and his older brother, James, a junior wideout, will again spark the offense.

After an 0–2 start in '08, the Beavers finished 9–4. Kristick, for one, is less interested in sustaining that level of success than in improving on it. "I'm a senior," he says. "I want to get that Rose Bowl." —A.M.

A running back in high school, Kristick uses his speed to close ground and deliver crushing hits at linebacker.

THE QUIZZ SHOW IS BACK FOR ITS SECOND SEASON IN CORVALLIS.



Fast Facts

CONFERENCE: Pac-10**COACH:** Mike Riley
(9th year overall)**2008 RECORD:** 9–4
(7–2 in Pac-10)**FINAL AP RANK:** 18**RETURNING****STARTERS:** 11

Offense 8, Defense 3

SCHEDULE**SEPTEMBER**5 Portland State
12 at UNLV
19 Cincinnati
26 Arizona**OCTOBER**3 at Arizona State
10 Stanford
24 at USC
31 UCLA**NOVEMBER**7 at Cal
14 Washington
21 at Washington State**DECEMBER**

3 at Oregon

KEY GAME

For the first time in 113 meetings, the Civil War will be played on a Thursday night. The winning team has scored at least 30 points in each of the last seven games and 50 or more three times.

WORTH NOTING

Seven Beavers—not one of whom was recruited by another Pac-10 program—were selected in the 2009 NFL draft. USC, with 11, was the only school in the country to have more players taken in April.

mySI SI.com/oregonstate Get the latest and best Beavers stories, statistics and fan blogs from across the Web, handpicked by the editors of SI.



The offensive spark will be provided by the elusive Jacquizz Rodgers, who became the first freshman to be named Pac-10 offensive player of the year.

19**UTAH**

A BCS repeat?
First the Utes
have to pick a
quarterback
to run their
spread attack

JACK-OF-ALL-TRADES

Stevenson Sylvester can stuff the run or drop into coverage. He can play the weak side and the strong, hence his listing as a rover linebacker. But there is one duty that this senior from Las Vegas enjoys more than anything else. "I love blitzing with a passion," says the 6' 2", 230-pound Sylvester. "I love getting to the quarterback and laying a hit on him. I would blitz every play if I could."

Alabama can attest to Sylvester's affinity for—and proficiency at—rushing the quarterback. After starting some R-rated trash talk with Crimson Tide All-America center Antoine Caldwell during the Sugar Bowl coin toss last January (on YouTube, search for "Utah," "player," "threatens" and "kill"), Sylvester blitzed his way to two sacks of John Parker Wilson, lured (his word) into a third and pressured him into throwing an interception. All told Wilson was sacked eight times as Utah rolled the Tide 31–17 to cap off its BCS-busting 13–0 season.

The Utes face a number of challenges in trying to ap-



DERICK HINGLE/ICON SMI

Utah will go as far as the defense, led by Sylvester, can carry the team.

"I WOULD BLITZ EVERY PLAY IF I COULD," SAYS SYLVESTER.

proach last season's surprising success, beginning with finding a replacement for quarterback Brian Johnson, who was 26–7 as a starter and the Mountain West Conference offensive player of the year in '08. As fall practice began there was no clear-cut front-runner among junior Corbin Louks, who has attempted 15 passes as a collegian; junior Terrance Cain, a first-team All-America at Blinn College in Brenham, Texas, last season; and Jordan Wynn, a freshman from Oceanside (Calif.) High who enrolled in January. "The job is unsettled, but in a posi-

tive way, if that makes sense," coach Kyle Whittingham says. "We have three guys we really like. We just have to make sure we choose the right one because I've never been a fan of playing two quarterbacks."

Whoever emerges as the starter will run an offense that is expected to spread the field even more than last year with four- and five-receiver sets under newly promoted coordinator Dave Schramm.

However, the strength of the team will be the defense, which has seven starters returning. It's a high-pressure unit that blitzes up to 50% of the time and relies heavily on the lightning-quick Sylvester coming off the edge. In 36 games, including 24 as a starter, he has 182 tackles, 19½ tackles for loss and seven sacks.

"He's a playmaker," Whittingham says. "It has happened ever since his freshman year when he intercepted a pass and ran it back for a touchdown in his third game. He's a big-play guy."

Just ask Alabama. —G.M.

Fast Facts**CONFERENCE:**

Mountain West

COACH:

Kyle Whittingham (5th year)

2008 RECORD:

13–0 (8–0 in Mountain West)

FINAL AP RANK:

2

RETURNING**STARTERS:**

11 Offense 4, Defense 7

SCHEDULE**SEPTEMBER**

3 Utah State

12 at San Jose State

→ 19 at Oregon

26 Louisville

OCTOBER

10 at Colorado State

17 at UNLV

24 Air Force

31 Wyoming

NOVEMBER

7 New Mexico

14 at TCU

21 San Diego State

28 at BYU

KEY GAME

Repeating as Mountain West champion will be anything but easy because of late-season trips to TCU and BYU, but first Utah can show it still belongs on the national stage with a victory in Eugene.

WORTH NOTING

Perhaps the win over Alabama in the Sugar Bowl shouldn't have been a surprise. The Utes are 11–3 in bowl games, have won their last eight in the postseason and also count USC, Pitt and Georgia Tech among their victims.



SI.com/utah Get the latest and best Utes stories, statistics and fan blogs from across the Web, handpicked by the editors of SI.



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20

NORTH CAROLINA

It's time to turn the close losses into big wins and step onto the national stage

NOTE TO basketball coach Roy Williams: Should you come up short of point guards, it wouldn't be a bad idea to check out the Tar Heels' trio of hyperquick linebackers. All have the wheels to run your frenetic fast break, and Bruce Carter, a 6' 3", 225-pound junior who played a little hoops in high school, has serious hops. He blocked a school-record five kicks or punts in 2008.

After playing running back, quarterback and safety at Havelock (N.C.) High, Carter was signed as an all-purpose athlete and arrived in Chapel Hill in January 2007. Coach Butch Davis, who had been hired just two months earlier, immediately moved him to linebacker. Eight months later Carter blocked a punt in a season-opening win over James Madison and wound up starting seven games as a freshman, playing in all 12. "Bruce has a knack for getting off the ball," says Davis. "And he's a good enough athlete to work his way through little cracks to give himself a chance to get to it."

Joining Carter at linebacker—he works the strong side—will be junior Quan Sturdivant, in

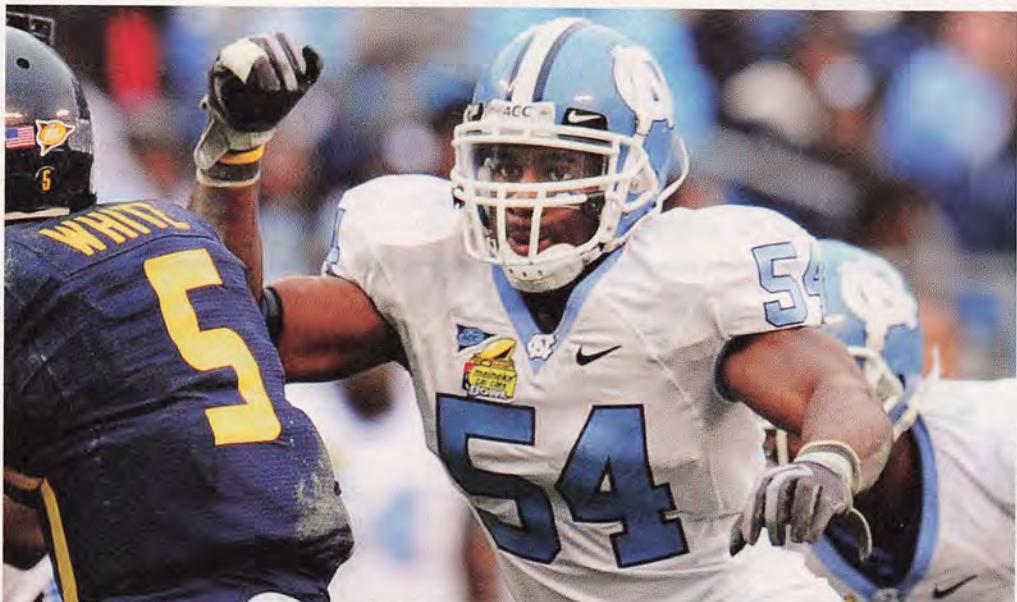
the middle, and sophomore Zach Brown, on the weak side. Sturdivant (6' 2", 230) had a team-high 87 solo tackles in 2008, while Brown (6' 2", 220) is the fastest of the three, having run a 4.28 40 in the spring. "You need speed," says Davis, who has rebuilt the defense in the mold of the fleet-footed ones he had at Miami, first as the line coach (1984 through '88) and then as head coach (1995 through 2000). "Middle linebackers don't make 20 tackles a game these days. Football isn't as much of a smashmouth game."

With nine starters back on defense, Davis figures to lean heavily on that unit to buy time for the young offense. The Tar Heels passed for 21 of their 39 offensive touchdowns last year, but they lost their top three wide receivers to the NFL and there will be three new faces starting on the line.

North Carolina is coming off its first winning season (8–5) since 2001, and four losses were by three points or less. Carter believes the Tar Heels are better prepared to finish off opponents. "This year's going to be our turning point," he says. — M.B.

AS HE DID
AT MIAMI,
DAVIS
BUILT HIS
DEFENSE
ON SPEED.

Carter needs only a crack to squeeze through to chase down the passer or smother a kick on special teams.



DALE ZANNE/US PRESSWIRE

Fast Facts

CONFERENCE: ACC

COACH: Butch Davis (3rd year)

2008 RECORD: 8–5 (4–4 in ACC)

FINAL AP RANK: NR

RETURNING STARTERS: 15

Offense 6, Defense 9

SCHEDULE

SEPTEMBER

5 The Citadel
12 at Connecticut
19 East Carolina

→ 26 at Georgia Tech

OCTOBER

3 Virginia
10 Georgia Southern
22 Florida State
29 at Virginia Tech

NOVEMBER

7 Duke
14 Miami
21 at Boston College
28 at N.C. State

→ **KEY GAME**

On the road against one of the teams to beat in the Coastal Division, the Tar Heels' ACC opener should go a long way toward showing whether they are indeed capable of challenging for the division title or they're still a year away.

WORTH NOTING

North Carolina plays consecutive Thursday night games against Florida State and Virginia Tech—two teams against whom the Tar Heels are a combined 1–17 since the two joined the ACC in 1992 and 2004, respectively.

ACC

By LARS ANDERSON

ATLANTIC	CONFERENCE		OVERALL	
	W-L	PCT.	W-L	PCT.
FLORIDA STATE	7-1	.875	9-3	.750
N.C. STATE	4-4	.500	8-4	.667
CLEMSON	4-4	.500	7-5	.583
WAKE FOREST	4-4	.500	7-5	.583
MARYLAND	2-6	.250	5-7	.417
BOSTON COLLEGE	2-6	.250	4-8	.333

How They'll Finish

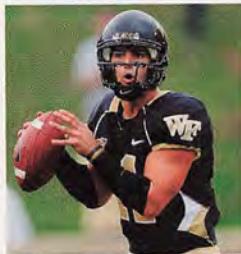
COASTAL	CONFERENCE		OVERALL	
	W-L	PCT.	W-L	PCT.
VIRGINIA TECH	7-1	.875	11-1	.917
GEORGIA TECH	6-2	.750	9-3	.750
NORTH CAROLINA	5-3	.625	9-3	.750
MIAMI	4-4	.500	7-5	.583
VIRGINIA	2-6	.250	4-8	.333
DUKE	1-7	.125	4-8	.333

Conference championship game: Dec. 5 in Tampa **Virginia Tech over Florida State****Players to Watch** Top performers from unranked teams in the conference

Ras-I Dowling
CB, Jr., Virginia
With good size for a corner (6' 2", 200 pounds), Dowling (*above, left*) ranked third in the ACC last season in passes defensed, with 14.



Jacoby Ford
WR, Sr., Clemson
The NCAA champion in the indoor 60 meters, Ford (*above, right*) is second among returning ACC players in receptions, with 87.



Jason Fox
T, Sr., Miami
A candidate for the Outland and Lombardi awards, the 6' 7" 314-pounder has made 36 starts on the offensive line.



Riley Skinner
QB, Sr., Wake Forest
He's the winningest QB in school history (26 victories as a starter) and the ACC's career leader in completion percentage (67.3).

Russell Wilson
QB, Soph., N.C. State
After throwing for 1,955 yards last year, he became the first freshman to be named the All-ACC quarterback.



Maryland has only 12 scholarship seniors, the lowest total in the nine-year tenure of coach **RALPH FRIEDGEN**. But at least the Terps are experienced at quarterback, where senior **CHRIS TURNER** has started 20 games. In his first two seasons Turner completed 59.7% of his passes, with 20 touchdowns and 18 interceptions. . . . Duke's average home attendance of 28,727 last season was its highest since 1994—the last time the Blue Devils appeared in a bowl game. Coach **DAVID CUTCLIFFE** is predicting his squad will be bowl eligible, and the reason for his optimism is senior **THADDEUS LEWIS** (*left*), who threw for more yards last season (2,171) than any other returning ACC quarterback. . . . New Virginia offensive coordinator **GREGG BRANDON**, formerly the coach at Bowling Green, is installing a no-huddle spread offense. It's the same fast-paced attack employed at Florida by Urban Meyer, who along with Brandon developed the offense at Bowling Green in 2001. . . . Boston College linebacker **MARK HERZLICH**, the 2008 ACC defensive player of the year, learned in May that he had Ewing's sarcoma, a rare form of bone cancer, in his femur. He's undergoing chemotherapy and hopes to return in 2010.



Best offensive player
Jonathan Dwyer
RB, Jr., Georgia Tech
The ACC's leading returning rusher (1,395 yards) is a perfect fit in coach Paul Johnson's flexbone offense.

Best defensive player
Dekoda Watson
LB, Sr., Florida State
With his blend of speed and power, the 6' 2" 228-pounder is a prototypical NFL outside linebacker.

True freshman to watch
Ray Ray Armstrong
S, Miami
At 6' 5", 220 pounds, the five-star recruit from Sanford, Fla., is already drawing comparisons with former Hurricane Sean Taylor.

Coach on the rise
Paul Johnson
Georgia Tech
Picked to finish last in the Coastal in his first season, Johnson (*left*) instead led the Yellow Jackets to nine victories and a share of the division title.

Coach on the hot seat
Al Groh
Virginia
He's 82-84 as he enters his ninth season and was 5-7 in two of the last three years. Groh probably won't survive if he has another losing season.

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BIG EAST

By KEVIN ARMSTRONG

Pitt QB Bill Stull »



How They'll Finish

	CONFERENCE	OVERALL		
	W-L	PCT.	W-L	PCT.
RUTGERS	5-2	.714	9-3	.750
WEST VIRGINIA	5-2	.714	9-3	.750
PITTSBURGH	5-2	.714	9-3	.750
CINCINNATI	4-3	.571	8-4	.667
SOUTH FLORIDA	4-3	.571	7-5	.583
CONNECTICUT	3-4	.429	5-7	.417
LOUISVILLE	1-6	.167	4-8	.333
SYRACUSE	1-6	.167	3-9	.250

Players to Watch

Top performers from unranked teams in the conference



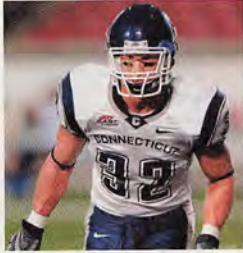
Victor Anderson
RB, Soph., Louisville
The Big East rookie of the year ran for 1,047 yards in 2008 and figures to get more work as the Cardinals break in QB Justin Burke.



Anthony Davis
OL, Jr., Rutgers
He anchors the Big East's top O-line, which returns all five starters on an offense that looks to improve on its No. 39 ranking of last year.



Matt Grothe
QB, Sr., South Florida
The 6-foot scrambler, who enters his fourth year as the Bulls' starter, threw for 18 touchdowns last season and ran for four more.



Scott Lutrus
LB, Jr., UConn
Moving from the outside to the middle in '08, he had a team-high 106 tackles and picked off four passes for the Big East's top defense.



Aaron Webster
SS, Sr., Cincinnati
The lone returning starter on the Bearcats' defense, Webster had a career-high 13 tackles in a big overtime win over West Virginia last year.



Extra Points

UConn lost its best player when tailback Donald Brown (2,083 rushing yards in 2008) left early for the NFL. Now the Huskies will try to improve a passing game that ranked 109th in the country last season. New offensive coordinator **JOE MOORHEAD**, who spent the last five seasons at Akron, plans to add a no-huddle look to the game plan. . . . Making another bid for its first Big East title, Rutgers must first find suitable replacements for five departed starters on defense. The Knights will build around senior middle linebacker **RYAN D'IMPERIO**, who had 93 tackles and 5½ sacks last season in his first full year as a starter. . . . Perhaps no one in the conference has a tougher act to follow than West Virginia senior quarterback **JARRETT BROWN** (left), who takes over for the prolific Pat White. In a reserve role over the past three seasons Brown threw 125 passes, with five touchdowns and four interceptions. . . . New Syracuse coach **DOUG MARRONE**, who spent the last three seasons as offensive coordinator of the pass-happy New Orleans Saints, is looking for a quarterback. Former Duke point guard **GREG PAULUS** is an option. Paulus, who has one year of eligibility left, has not played since high school, in '05, but he entered fall practice third on the depth chart.

Best offensive player
Noel Devine
TB, Jr.,
West Virginia
With QB Pat White gone, the 5' 8", 175-pound dynamo should build on his breakout 2008 season (1,289 yards, four TDs).

Best defensive player
George Selvie
DE, Sr.,
South Florida
Due to constant double teams, Selvie (left) saw his sack total dip from 14½ in '07 to 5½ last year, but NFL teams are high on the speed rusher.

True freshman to watch
Dion Lewis
TB, Pitt
The 5' 8", 190-pound speedster was an early enrollee, and coach Dave Wannstedt says that Lewis could get 30 touches per game.

Coach on the rise
Brian Kelly
Cincinnati
He has won 22 games and a Big East title in two seasons with the Bearcats. No wonder his name gets mentioned when high-profile jobs are open.

Coach on the hot seat
Steve Kragthorpe
Louisville
After losing his last five games to drop his two-year record to 11-13, he's taking on offensive coordinator duties as well.



Notable



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BIG TEN

By
MARK BEECH

Penn State RB Evan Royster »



How They'll Finish

	CONFERENCE		OVERALL	
	W-L	PCT.	W-L	PCT.
OHIO STATE	7-1	.875	10-2	.833
PENN STATE	6-2	.750	10-2	.833
IOWA	5-3	.625	9-3	.750
MICHIGAN ST.	5-3	.625	8-4	.667
ILLINOIS	5-3	.625	8-4	.667
NORTHWESTERN	4-4	.500	8-4	.667
WISCONSIN	4-4	.500	8-4	.667
MINNESOTA	4-4	.500	7-5	.583
MICHIGAN	3-5	.375	7-5	.583
PURDUE	1-7	.125	3-9	.250
INDIANA	0-8	.000	2-10	.167

Players to Watch

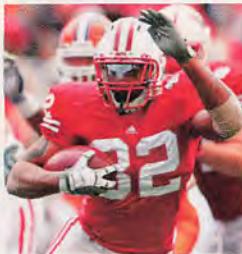
Top performers from unranked teams in the conference



Arrelious Benn
WR, Jr., Illinois
The favorite target of QB Juice Williams, he caught 67 passes for 1,055 yards in 2008 and is a threat as a punt and kick returner.



Bryan Bulaga
LT, Jr., Iowa
As a 6' 6" 312-pounder and a starter since his freshman year, he has drawn comparisons to former Hawkeye Robert Gallery, the 2003 Outland winner.



John Clay
RB, Soph., Wisconsin
A 6' 2" 247-pounder who blends speed and power, he averaged 5.7 yards a carry and rushed for nine TDs as a backup last season.



Jammie Kirlew
DE, Sr., Indiana
After finishing second in the conference in sacks with 10½, Kirlew (6' 3", 263) was the only Hoosier named All-Big Ten (second team) in '08.



Jordan Mabin
CB, Soph., Northwestern
The 5' 11", 180-pound Mabin, who doubles as a return man, had three interceptions last season and was named a freshman All-America.



Minnesota is coming off its first winning season since 2005, but the Gophers lost their final five games after starting 7-1. Third-year coach **TIM BREWSTER** is junking the spread in favor of a pro-style attack. **JEDD FISCH**, formerly the Broncos' receivers coach, was hired as offensive coordinator, and the 33-year-old veteran of eight NFL seasons has set about fixing a ground game that last year averaged 104 yards a game and 3.1 yards per rush, both Big Ten lows. . . . Another team looking to improve its running game is Indiana, where third-year offensive coordinator **MATT CANADA** is experimenting with the pistol, which combines the shotgun and the I formation. Key to this transition will be the play of redshirt freshman tailback **DARIUS WILLIS**, who, at 6 feet, 219 pounds, possesses size and speed. . . . On a Purdue offense bereft of playmakers, freshman running back **AL-TEREK MCBURSE** stands out. A four-star recruit who turned down offers from Georgia Tech and Miami, the 6-foot, 204-pound native of Winter Springs, Fla., enrolled in January, only to miss spring ball while awaiting NCAA clearance. He's a threat as both a runner and a receiver.



Best offensive player
Daryl Clark
QB, Sr., Penn State
Ohio State's Terrelle Pryor might be more gifted, but he's not yet at the level of Clark, who directs one of the nation's most versatile backfields.

Best defensive player
Sean Lee
LB, Sr., Penn State
A second-team All-Big Ten pick in 2007, when he was second in the conference in tackles, Lee returns after an ACL tear wiped out his '08 season.

True freshman to watch
Tate Forcier
QB, Michigan
The San Diego product enrolled in January and had fans chanting his name at the spring game, when he threw for four TDs and ran for another.

Coach on the rise
Mark Dantonio
Michigan State
He turned a team in disarray into a winner, going 7-6 and 9-4 in his first two seasons. With 15 starters back, the Spartans could be a Big Ten sleeper.

Coach on the hot seat
Bret Bielema
Wisconsin
Since Bielema burst onto the scene with a 12-1 record in his first season, the Badgers have gone 9-4 and 7-6 and have struggled offensively.

FROM TOP: DAVID BERGMAN; MARK COWAN/ICON SMI; SCOTT BOEHM/GETTY IMAGES; MIKE MCGINNIS/CAL SPORT MEDIA; AJ MAST/ICON SMI; MICHAEL DINOVIC/CAL SPORT MEDIA; JANE SABA/ICON SMI

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BIG 12

By PHIL TAYLOR

How They'll Finish

	CONFERENCE		OVERALL			CONFERENCE		OVERALL		
	W-L	PCT.	W-L	PCT.		W-L	PCT.	W-L	PCT.	
KANSAS	5-3	.625	9-3	.750		TEXAS	8-0	1.000	12-0	1.000
MISSOURI	5-3	.625	8-4	.667		OKLAHOMA	7-1	.875	11-1	.917
NEBRASKA	5-3	.625	8-4	.667		OKLAHOMA ST.	6-2	.750	10-2	.833
COLORADO	3-5	.375	6-6	.500		TEXAS TECH	4-4	.500	8-4	.667
KANSAS STATE	2-6	.250	5-7	.417		BAYLOR	2-6	.250	5-7	.417
IOWA STATE	0-8	.000	3-9	.250		TEXAS A&M	1-7	.125	4-8	.333

Conference championship game: Dec. 5 in Arlington, Texas **Texas over Kansas**

Players to Watch

Top performers from unranked teams in the conference



Brandon Banks
WR, Sr., Kansas State

The short story on the speedy Banks: He's only 5'7", 142 pounds, but he puts up big numbers: 1,049 receiving yards and 11 TDs in '08.



Brandon Carter
T, Sr., Texas Tech

Known for his multiple piercings and face paint, the 6'7" 354-pounder is a skilled pass blocker and a steamroller on running plays.



Joe Pawelek
MLB, Sr., Baylor

In addition to being the brains of the Bears' defense, he was among the nation's top 10 in tackles (128) and interceptions (six) last season.



Todd Reesing
QB, Sr., Kansas

Owner of most of KU's passing records, he's ideal for the spread because of his ability to make quick decisions and to throw accurately on the run.



Ndamukong Suh
DT, Sr., Nebraska

The agile lineman led the Huskers in tackles, returned two interceptions for TDs and caught a scoring pass as a goal line fullback.

Extra Points

Trying to replicate the success that teams such as Kansas, Missouri and Texas Tech have had with the spread offense, Iowa State is making the switch. New coach **PAUL RHOADS** hired offensive coordinator **TOM HERMAN**, who installed the high-scoring attack at Rice. . . . No team in the conference lost more talent than Missouri. Sophomore **BLAINE GABBERT** (left) steps in at QB for the departed Chase Daniel; on defense, linebacker **SEAN WEATHERSPOON** is a solid anchor, but the line has only one returning starter, **JARON BASTON**. . . . Look for Texas A&M to use some trickery with **RYAN TANNEHILL**, a would-be QB who moved to receiver as a freshman and caught 55 passes for 844 yards. Tannehill may take some snaps, but he'll be equally dangerous as a wideout who might throw option passes. . . . It's not often that a blue-chip recruit chooses Baylor over Texas, but four-star safety **AHMAD DIXON** of Midway High in Waco backed out of his verbal commitment to the Longhorns in May. Keep in mind that Baylor coach **ART BRILES** also voted Texas fifth in the final coaches' poll last season, helping to kill the Longhorns' chances of playing in the BCS title game, and the Bears have been getting under the Horns' skin lately.

Notable

Best offensive player

Sam Bradford
QB, Jr., Oklahoma

The Heisman winner was prolific (50 TD passes), accurate (67.9%) and committed few mistakes (eight interceptions) in 2008.

Best defensive player

Gerald McCoy
DT, Jr., Oklahoma

A run stuffer who can also generate a pass rush, McCoy (left) greatly improved the Sooners' defensive outlook when he bypassed the NFL draft.

True freshman to watch

Nick Kasa
DE, Colorado

After committing to Florida, the 6'7" Thornton, Colo., native decided instead to stay in state; he could contribute immediately as a pass rusher.

Coach on the rise

Bo Pelini
Nebraska

Last fall, in his first season, he won admirers not only for leading the Huskers to a 9-4 season but also for embracing the program's history and tradition.

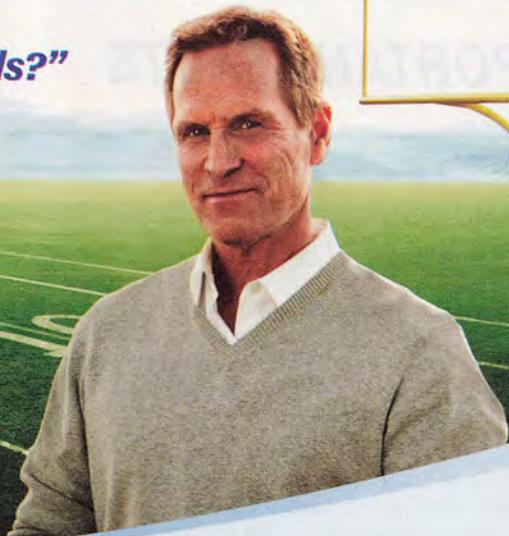
Coach on the hot seat

Dan Hawkins
Colorado

After three years in Boulder he has a 13-24 record; a fourth consecutive sub-.500 season would be hazardous to his job security.



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Ask your doctor if Caduet can help you go for both your goals and visit www.caduet.com to learn more.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION:

Caduet is a prescription drug that combines 2 medicines, Norvasc and Lipitor. Norvasc is used to treat high blood pressure (hypertension), chest pain (angina) or blocked arteries of the heart (coronary artery disease); Lipitor is used along with diet and exercise to lower high cholesterol. It is also used to lower the risk of heart attack and stroke in people with multiple risk factors for heart disease such as family history, high blood pressure, age, low HDL-C, or smoking.

Caduet is not for everyone. It is not for those with liver problems. And it is not for women who are nursing, are pregnant, or may become pregnant. If you take Caduet, tell

your doctor if you feel any new muscle pain or weakness. This could be a sign of rare but serious muscle side effects. Tell your doctor about all of the medicines you take. This may help avoid serious drug interactions. Your doctor should do blood tests to check your liver function before and during treatment and may adjust your dose. If you have any heart problems, be sure to tell your doctor. The most common side effects are edema, headache, and dizziness. They tend to be mild and often go away.

Caduet can be used alone or with other high blood pressure medicines. Caduet is one of many options for treating high blood pressure and high cholesterol, in addition to diet and exercise, that you or your doctor can consider.

Please see the accompanying patient information on the following page.

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Visit www.FDA.gov/medwatch or call 1-800-FDA-1088.

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With the help of your doctor and a medicine like CADUET, along with diet and exercise, you could be on your way to lowering your blood pressure and cholesterol. Ready to start eating right and exercising more? Talk to your doctor and visit the American Heart Association at www.americanheart.org.

WHO IS CADUET FOR?

Who can take CADUET:

- Adults who need to lower their blood pressure AND who cannot lower their cholesterol enough with diet and exercise

Who should NOT take CADUET:

- Women who are pregnant, may be pregnant, or may become pregnant. CADUET may harm your unborn baby. If you become pregnant, stop CADUET and call your doctor right away.
- Women who are breast-feeding. CADUET can pass into your breast milk and may harm your baby.
- People with liver problems
- People allergic to anything in CADUET

BEFORE YOU START CADUET

Tell your doctor:

- About all the medicines you take, including prescription and nonprescription medicines, vitamins, and herbal supplements
- If you ever had heart disease
- If you have muscle aches or weakness
- If you drink more than 2 glasses of alcohol daily
- If you have diabetes or kidney problems
- If you have thyroid problems

ABOUT CADUET

CADUET is a prescription medicine that combines Norvasc® (amlodipine besylate) for high blood pressure and Lipitor® (atorvastatin calcium) for high cholesterol in one pill. CADUET, along with diet and exercise, treats both high blood pressure (hypertension) and high cholesterol. CADUET can lower the risk of heart attack or stroke in patients with risk factors for heart disease—such as heart disease in the family, high blood pressure, being older than 55, having low HDL-C, diabetes, or smoking.

POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS OF CADUET

Serious side effects in a small number of people:

Muscle problems that can lead to kidney problems. This includes kidney failure. You have a higher chance for muscle problems if you take certain other medicines with CADUET.

Liver problems. Your doctor may do blood tests to check your liver before you start CADUET and while you are taking it.

Symptoms of muscle or liver problems include:

- Unexplained muscle weakness or pain, especially if you have a fever or feel very tired
- Nausea, vomiting, or stomach pain
- Brown or dark-colored urine
- Feeling more tired than usual
- Your skin and the whites of your eyes turn yellow

If you have these symptoms, call your doctor right away.

Chest pain. Sometimes chest pain that does not go away or gets worse or a heart attack can happen. If this happens, call your doctor or go to the emergency room right away.

Common side effects of CADUET include:

• headache	• constipation
• swelling of legs or ankles	• gas
• feeling dizzy	• upset stomach and stomach pain

These side effects are usually mild and go away. There are other side effects of CADUET. Ask your doctor or pharmacist for a complete list.

HOW TO TAKE CADUET

Do:

- Take CADUET once a day as prescribed by your doctor.
- Try to eat heart-healthy foods while you take CADUET.
- Take CADUET at any time of day, with or without food.
- If you miss a dose, take it as soon as you remember. But if it has been more than 12 hours since your missed dose, wait. Take the next dose at your regular time.

Don't:

- Do not break CADUET tablets before taking them.
- Do not stop taking nitroglycerin, if you take it for angina.
- Do not change or stop your dose before talking with your doctor.
- Do not start new medicines or stop any medicines you are taking before talking to the doctor.

NEED MORE INFORMATION?

- Ask your doctor, health-care provider, or pharmacist. This is only a summary of the most important information.
- Go to www.caduet.com or call (866) 514-0900.

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PAC-10

By
CORY
McCARTNEY



USC FS Taylor Mays»

Players to Watch Top performers from unranked teams in the conference

	CONFERENCE		OVERALL	
	W-L	PCT.	W-L	PCT.
USC	8-1	.889	11-1	.917
OREGON	7-2	.778	9-3	.750
OREGON STATE	6-3	.667	9-3	.750
CAL	6-3	.667	9-3	.750
UCLA	5-4	.556	7-5	.583
ARIZONA STATE	5-4	.556	6-6	.500
ARIZONA	3-6	.333	5-7	.417
STANFORD	3-6	.333	6-6	.500
WASHINGTON	2-7	.222	3-9	.250
WASHINGTON ST.	0-9	.000	2-10	.167



Dexter Davis
DE, Sr., Arizona State
This underrated pass rusher is one of four players who had at least 10 sacks in each of the past two seasons. His career total is 27.



Rob Gronkowski
TE, Jr., Arizona
The 6' 6" 265-pounder has great hands (47 catches last year), averaged a touchdown for every 4.7 receptions and is a physical blocker.



Jake Locker
QB, Jr., Washington
This dangerous runner (1,116 yards in 16 games) has to improve his accuracy (48.7%) in Steve Sarkisian's West Coast offense.



Brian Price
DT, Jr., UCLA
He led Pac-10 interior linemen with 14 tackles for loss in '08, including 12 in the last nine games; he has 21 in his last 16 games.



Syd'Quan Thompson
CB, Sr., Cal
The four-year starter developed into a lockdown corner (four picks, 18 passes defended in '08) and doubles as a punt returner.



Extra Points

UCLA quarterbacks threw nine touchdown passes and were picked off 21 times in 2008 for an offense that ranked 109th in the country. Coach **RICK NEUHEISEL** will turn things over to redshirt freshman **KEVIN PRINCE**, who suffered a knee injury in the opener of his senior season at Crespi Carmelite High in Encino, Calif., in 2007 and hasn't played in a game since. . . . Before he took the job as Cal's offensive coordinator, **ANDY LUDWIG** had never worked with coach **JEFF TEDFORD**, but the two do have a history. Ludwig replaced Tedford as Fresno State's offensive coordinator in 1998 and followed Tedford in the same job at Oregon four years later. . . . Oregon State must replace all four starters in the secondary, who combined for 141 career starts. The last time the Beavers were so inexperienced in the defensive backfield was in 2005, when they finished 117th in the country against the pass. . . . USC may have lost four linebackers—they were all taken in the first four rounds of the NFL draft in April—but that doesn't mean the Trojans will be short on experience at the position. **CHRIS GALIPPO** (*left*), **MICHAEL MORGAN** and **MALCOLM SMITH**, all juniors, have appeared in a combined 63 games.



Notable

Best offensive player
Jahvid Best
RB, Jr., Cal
A threat to score every time he touches the ball, Best (*left*) was second nationally last season in all-purpose yards (187.3 a game).

Best defensive player
Taylor Mays
FS, Sr., USC
He can cover backs and wideouts with his 4.4 speed, but Mays may be best known for his bone-jarring tackles, which have become YouTube hits.

True freshman
to watch
Vontaze Burfict
LB, Arizona State
The top prospect at his position, Burfict originally committed to USC. Now he may crack the Sun Devils' experienced starting lineup.

Coach on the rise
Jim Harbaugh
Stanford
After taking over a team that had one win in 2006, he has improved from 4-8 to 5-7. Next up: the Cardinal's first bowl invitation since 2001.

Coach on the hot seat
Paul Wulff
Washington State
In his first year the Cougars went 2-11 and were outscored by 31.1 points a game. Will Wazzu fans stand for being the Pac-10's laughingstock?

SECBy
ANDY STAPLES**How They'll Finish**

CONFERENCE		OVERALL		CONFERENCE		OVERALL	
EAST	W-L	PCT.	W-L	PCT.	WEST	W-L	PCT.
FLORIDA	8-0	1.000	12-0	1.000	OLEMISS	7-1	.875
GEORGIA	5-3	.625	9-3	.750	ALABAMA	7-1	.875
TENNESSEE	3-5	.375	7-5	.583	LSU	5-3	.625
KENTUCKY	2-6	.250	5-7	.417	ARKANSAS	3-5	.375
S. CAROLINA	2-6	.250	5-7	.417	MISSISSIPPI ST.	3-5	.375
VANDERBILT	1-7	.125	4-8	.333	AUBURN	2-6	.250
						6-6	.500

Conference championship game: Dec. 5 in Atlanta **Florida over Ole Miss****Players to Watch** Top performers from unranked teams in the conference**Antonio Coleman**
DE, Sr., Auburn

An All-SEC choice in '08, when he had six sacks, Coleman led the Tigers in that department in each of the past two seasons, with a total of 14½.

**Trevard Lindley**
CB, Sr., Kentucky

A corner on the Nagurski Award watch list, Lindley intercepted four passes and broke up 11 more as a junior. He has made 39 consecutive starts.

**Josh McNeil**
C, Sr., Tennessee

The 6' 4" 280-pounder has started 35 straight games and will provide stability in the transition to new coach Lane Kiffin's pro-style offense.

**Eric Norwood**
LB, Sr., South Carolina

An All-SEC selection at defensive end in 2007 and at linebacker in '08, he is the Gamecocks' career leader in tackles for loss with 43.

**Michael Smith**
RB, Sr., Arkansas

The diminutive Smith (5' 7", 176) averaged an SEC-best 141.4 all-purpose yards and scored 10 touchdowns in 10 games last season.

**Extra Points**

Arkansas has replaced the grass at Reynolds Razorback Stadium with a synthetic surface that coach **BOBBY PETRINO** expects will give his skill-position players an edge. "With what we ask our players to do with the timing and the passing and precision and speed of the running game, I think it will be an advantage for us," says Petrino. . . . Auburn began preseason practice with a quarterback quandary for the second consecutive season. Junior **KODI BURNS** and senior **CHRIS TODD**, who split the job last year, are back, and junior **NEIL CAUDLE**, who attempted five passes in '08, is in the mix. What's more, three true freshmen will crowd the QB meeting room, including Sulphur Springs, Texas, product **TYRIK ROLLISON**, who was ranked the No. 2 dual-threat quarterback in the class of 2009 by Rivals.com. . . . How long did Mississippi State athletic director **GREG BYRNE** need to realize that **DAN MULLEN** (left) was the right man to coach the Bulldogs? "Twenty or 30 minutes," Byrne says of the former Florida offensive coordinator, who impressed the AD with his preparation and master plan early in an eight-hour meeting at an Atlanta hotel. A day later Mullen got the job.

**Notable**

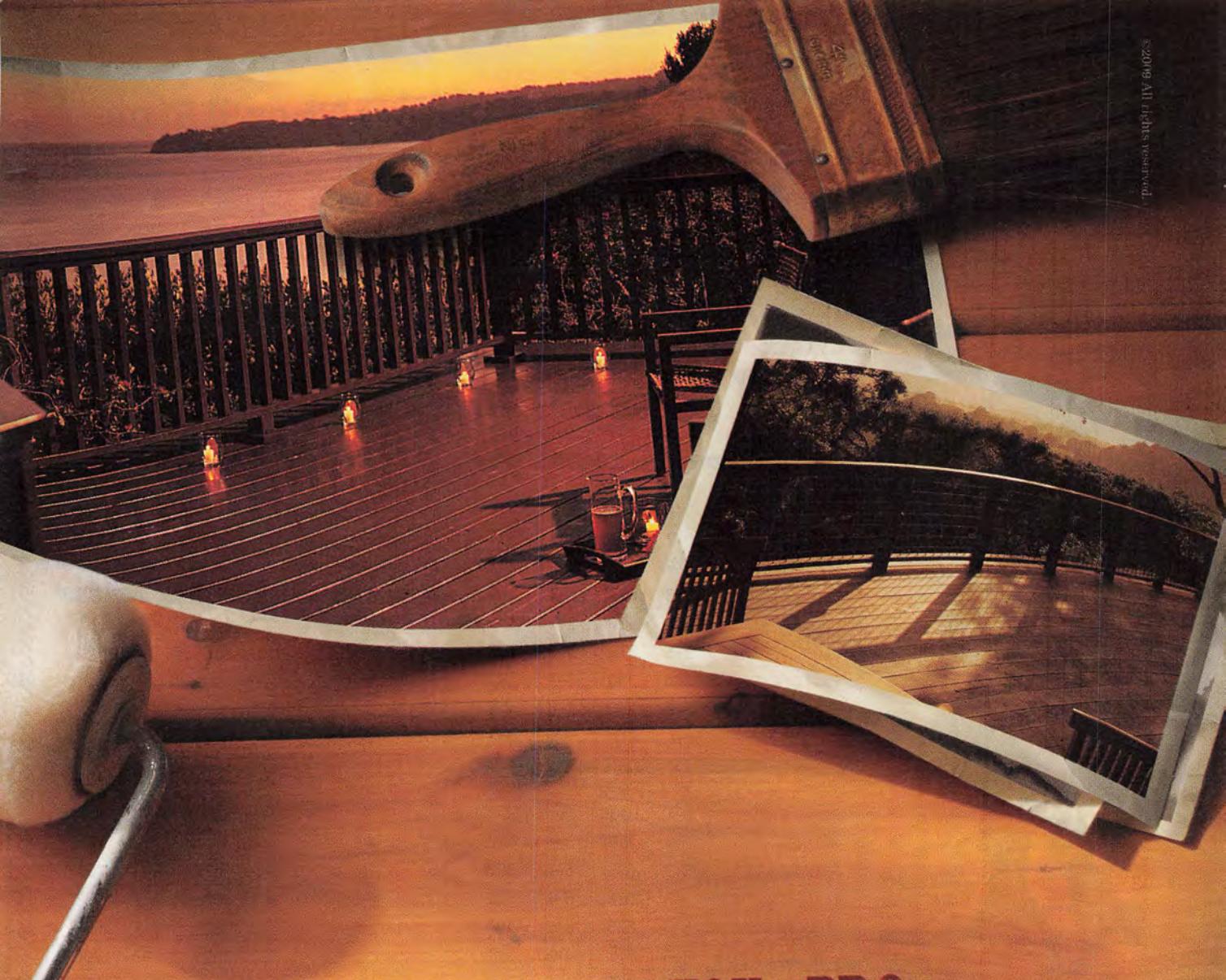
Top offensive player
Tim Tebow
QB, Sr., Florida
Without Percy Harvin, Tebow could again put up the type of stats that won him the Heisman in 2007, when he passed for 32 TDs and ran for 23 more.

Top defensive player
Eric Berry
SS, Jr., Tennessee
The versatile Berry (left) needs 15 interception-return yards to break former Florida State corner Terrell Buckley's I-A record of 501.

True freshman to watch
Russell Shepard
QB, LSU
The electrifying Texan could spell starter Jordan Jefferson and also might be lined up as a receiver and used to run back kicks and punts.

Coach on the rise
Bobby Petrino
Arkansas
Working mostly under the radar in the loaded SEC, the second-year man will attract attention once the Razorbacks upset a conference power.

Coach on the hot seat
Gene Chizik
Auburn
His 5-19 record at Iowa State made him an unpopular choice, but he has recruited well in the new job. Will Auburn fans give him time to turn things around?



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The Rest

By
CORY MCCARTNEY



Notre Dame QB
Jimmy Clausen

INDEPENDENTS	OVERALL	
	W-L	PCT.
NOTRE DAME	9-3	.750
NAVY	9-4	.692
ARMY	3-9	.250

MOUNTAIN WEST	CONFERENCE		OVERALL	
	W-L	PCT.	W-L	PCT.
TCU	7-1	.875	11-1	.917
UTAH	7-1	.875	10-2	.833
BYU	7-1	.875	10-2	.833
UNLV	5-3	.625	8-4	.667
AIR FORCE	4-4	.500	6-6	.500
COLORADO STATE	3-5	.375	5-7	.417
SAN DIEGO STATE	1-7	.125	4-8	.333
WYOMING	2-6	.250	3-9	.250
NEW MEXICO	0-8	.000	1-11	.083
SUN BELT	CONFERENCE		OVERALL	
	W-L	PCT.	W-L	PCT.
TROY	8-0	1.000	10-2	.833
ARKANSAS STATE	6-2	.750	7-5	.583
FLA. ATLANTIC	5-3	.625	7-5	.583
MIDDLE TENN.	5-3	.625	5-7	.417
LA.-MONROE	4-4	.500	5-7	.417
FLORIDA INT'L	3-5	.375	3-9	.250
LA.-LAFAYETTE	2-6	.250	3-9	.250
NORTH TEXAS	2-6	.250	2-10	.166
W. KENTUCKY	1-7	.125	1-11	.083
WAC	CONFERENCE		OVERALL	
	W-L	PCT.	W-L	PCT.
BOISE STATE	8-0	1.000	13-0	1.000
NEVADA	6-2	.750	8-4	.667
FRESNO STATE	5-3	.625	6-6	.500
LOUISIANA TECH	5-3	.625	6-6	.500
UTAH STATE	5-3	.625	6-6	.500
SAN JOSE STATE	3-5	.375	4-8	.333
HAWAII	3-5	.375	4-9	.308
IDAHO	1-7	.125	3-9	.250
NEW MEXICO ST.	0-8	.000	1-12	.077

How They'll Finish

CONFERENCE USA		CONFERENCE	OVERALL	
EAST	WEST		W-L	PCT.
EAST CAROLINA	7-1	.875	8-4	.667
SOUTHERN MISS	6-2	.750	9-3	.750
CENTRAL FLORIDA	5-3	.625	7-5	.583
MARSHALL	3-5	.375	4-8	.333
MEMPHIS	2-6	.250	4-8	.333
UAB	0-8	.000	1-11	.083
WEST			W-L	PCT.
UTEP	8-0	1.000	10-2	.833
HOUSTON	6-2	.750	8-4	.667
TULSA	4-4	.500	6-6	.500
SMU	3-5	.375	5-7	.417
RICE	3-5	.375	3-9	.250
TULANE	1-7	.125	3-9	.250

Championship game: Dec. 5 at higher-seeded division winner UTEP over East Carolina

MAC		CONFERENCE	OVERALL	
EAST	WEST		W-L	PCT.
OHIO	6-2	.750	9-3	.750
TEMPLE	5-3	.625	7-5	.583
AKRON	4-4	.500	6-6	.500
BUFFALO	4-4	.500	5-7	.417
BOWLING GREEN	2-6	.250	4-8	.333
KENT STATE	2-6	.250	3-9	.250
MIAMI	2-6	.250	2-10	.167
WEST			W-L	PCT.
C. MICHIGAN	7-1	.875	9-3	.750
BALL STATE	5-3	.625	7-5	.583
W. MICHIGAN	5-3	.625	7-5	.583
TOLEDO	5-3	.625	6-6	.500
NO. ILLINOIS	4-4	.500	5-7	.417
E. MICHIGAN	1-7	.125	2-10	.167

Championship game: Dec. 4 in Detroit Central Michigan over Ohio

Players to Watch

Top performers from unranked teams



Damion Fletcher
RB, Sr., Southern Miss

The C-USA player of the year in 2007, he is the active Division I-A leader in four career rushing categories, including yards (4,287).



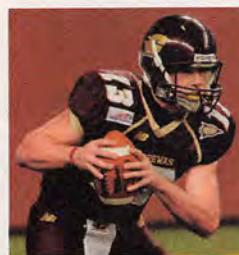
Jan Jorgensen
DE, Sr., BYU

The Mountain West's career sacks leader shed 15 pounds (to 259) in a bid to return to his 2007 form, when he had 13½ QB takedowns.



Colin Kaepernick
QB, Jr., Nevada

The WAC offensive player of the year in '08 became the fifth I-A quarterback with 2,000 yards passing and 1,000 rushing in a season.



Dan LeFevour
QB, Sr., Central Michigan

Nicknamed Tim Tebow Lite, he enters his final season as the I-A active leader in total yards, with 11,702—or 3,275 more than Tebow has.



Rusty Smith
QB, Sr., Florida Atlantic

Coach Howard Schnellenberger compares Smith, who has thrown for 6,912 yards and 56 TDs over the past two seasons, with Bernie Kosar.



Notable

Extra Points

Last season Central Michigan's **ANTONIO BROWN** (right) and Central Florida's Joe Burnett became the first two players in I-A history to earn first-team all-conference honors at three positions (wideout, kick returner and punt returner). . . . Middle Tennessee finished 91st in scoring last year, but the Blue Raiders should get a boost from offensive coordinator **TONY FRANKLIN**, the architect of Troy's high-powered spread in 2006 and '07 and Auburn's midseason fall guy last year. . . . San Diego State has plenty of star power—in its staff.

New coach **BRADY HOKE** brought in former Auburn aide **AL BORGES** as offensive coordinator, former New Mexico coach **ROCKY LONG** as defensive coordinator and former Browns and Aztecs passer **BRIAN SIPE** as QB coach. . . . For the first time in his 13 seasons at Fresno State, **PAT HILL** has new coordinators on both sides of the ball. **JEFF GRADY** (passing game) and **DEREK FRAZIER** (running) take over the offense from Doug Nussmeier, who left for Washington. **RANDY STEWART** will coordinate the defense, replacing Dan Brown, who died of cancer shortly after retiring. . . . Army has the tallest receiver in Division I-A in 6' 10", 283-pound senior tight end **ALI VILLANUEVA**.



Top offensive player

Max Hall

QB, Sr., BYU

Hall (*left*) threw for 3,957 yards and 35 TDs, completed 69.2% of his attempts and ranked ninth in the country in total offense (313.2 yards per game) last season.

Top defensive player

Jerry Hughes

DE, Sr., TCU

The former high school tailback, who stands 6' 3" and weighs 257 pounds, led the nation in sacks (15) and forced fumbles (six) en route to All-America honors.

True freshman to watch

Manti Te'o

LB, Notre Dame

The 6' 2" 225-pounder from Punahoa High in Honolulu, who surprisingly choose the Irish over USC, should thrive in coordinator Jon Tenuta's 4-3 scheme.

Coach on the hot seat

Charlie Weis

Notre Dame

Those BCS bids in his first two seasons are a distant memory. The schedule sets up nicely, but after winning 10 games total the past two years, there is no room for error.

Coach on the rise

Kevin Sumlin

Houston

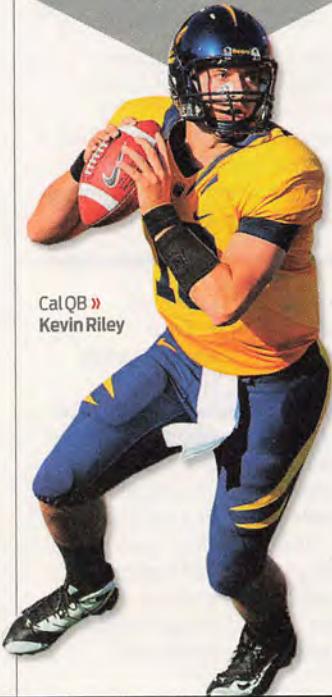
In his first season the ex-Oklahoma assistant took an offense that had lost its top two receivers and rusher and made an explosive attack even more productive.

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AND
MARK BEECH



Cal QB »
Kevin Riley

Rankings: 1 to 120

1. Florida	SEC		
2. Texas	BIG 12		
3. Oklahoma	BIG 12		
4. USC	PAC-10		
5. Virginia Tech	ACC		
6. Ole Miss	SEC		
7. Oklahoma State	BIG 12		
8. Alabama	SEC		
9. Boise State	WAC		
10. Ohio State	BIG TEN		
11. Oregon	PAC-10		
12. Georgia Tech	ACC		
13. LSU	SEC		
14. Penn State	BIG TEN		
15. Georgia	SEC		
16. Florida State	ACC		
17. TCU	MOUNTAIN WEST		
18. Oregon State	PAC-10		
19. Utah	MOUNTAIN WEST		
20. North Carolina	ACC		
21. Cal	PAC-10		
22. BYU	MOUNTAIN WEST		
23. Kansas	BIG 12		
24. Iowa	BIG TEN		
25. Notre Dame	INDEPENDENT		
26. Texas Tech	BIG 12		
27. Rutgers	BIG EAST		
28. West Virginia	BIG EAST		
29. Michigan State	BIG TEN		
30. Pittsburgh	BIG EAST		
31. Missouri	BIG 12		
32. N.C. State	ACC		
33. Illinois	BIG TEN		
34. Nebraska	BIG 12		
35. Southern Miss	CONFERENCE USA		
36. Miami	ACC		
37. Arkansas	SEC		
38. Tennessee	SEC		
39. Cincinnati	BIG EAST		
40. East Carolina	CONFERENCE USA		
41. South Florida	BIG EAST		
42. Northwestern	BIG TEN		
43. Clemson	ACC		
44. Troy	SUN BELT		
45. Nevada	WAC		
46. UTEP	CONFERENCE USA		
47. Central Michigan	MAC		
48. Wisconsin	BIG TEN		
49. Wake Forest	ACC		
50. UCLA	PAC-10		
51. Minnesota	BIG TEN		
52. Navy	INDEPENDENT		
53. Michigan	BIG TEN		
54. UNLV	MOUNTAIN WEST		
55. Colorado	BIG 12		
56. Kentucky	SEC		
57. Houston	CONFERENCE USA		
58. Arizona State	PAC-10		
59. Ohio	MAC		
60. South Carolina	SEC		
61. Baylor	BIG 12		
62. Stanford	PAC-10		
63. Mississippi State	SEC		
64. Connecticut	BIG EAST		
65. Auburn	SEC		
66. Vanderbilt	SEC		
67. Maryland	ACC		
68. Air Force	MOUNTAIN WEST		
69. Kansas State	BIG 12		
70. Arizona	PAC-10		
71. Boston College	ACC		
72. Central Florida	CONFERENCE USA		
73. Fresno State	WAC		
74. Tulsa	CONFERENCE USA		
75. Ball State	MAC		
76. Virginia	ACC		
77. Colorado State	MOUNTAIN WEST		
78. Duke	ACC		
79. Texas A&M	BIG 12		
80. Temple	MAC		
81. Louisiana Tech	WAC		
82. Toledo	MAC		
83. Louisville	BIG EAST		
84. Western Michigan	MAC		
85. Washington	PAC-10		
86. Buffalo	MAC		
87. Purdue	BIG TEN		
88. Utah State	WAC		
89. SMU	CONFERENCE USA		
90. Iowa State	BIG 12		
91. Akron	MAC		
92. Arkansas State	SUN BELT		
93. Florida Atlantic	SUN BELT		
94. Marshall	CONFERENCE USA		
95. Hawaii	WAC		
96. Syracuse	BIG EAST		
97. Northern Illinois	MAC		
98. Memphis	CONFERENCE USA		
99. Indiana	BIG TEN		
100. Bowling Green	MAC		
101. San Jose State	WAC		
102. Army	INDEPENDENT		
103. Kent State	MAC		
104. Wyoming	MOUNTAIN WEST		
105. Washington State	PAC-10		
106. Tulane	CONFERENCE USA		
107. Rice	CONFERENCE USA		
108. San Diego State	MOUNTAIN WEST		
109. Middle Tennessee	SUN BELT		
110. Louisiana-Monroe	SUN BELT		
111. New Mexico	MOUNTAIN WEST		
112. UAB	CONFERENCE USA		
113. Miami (Ohio)	MAC		
114. Eastern Michigan	MAC		
115. Florida International	SUN BELT		
116. Louisiana-Lafayette	SUN BELT		
117. Idaho	WAC		
118. New Mexico State	WAC		
119. North Texas	SUN BELT		
120. Western Kentucky	SUN BELT		

BEN MUNICIPAL SPORT MEDIA

WEEKENDVILLE

Juicy Johnsonville Sausage sizzling slowly on the grill after another hectic week. For a moment, Monday seems like a long, long way away.
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Bowl Projections

Dec. 19	New Mexico	UNLV vs. Utah State
Dec. 19	St. Petersburg	South Florida vs. Central Florida
Dec. 20	New Orleans	East Carolina vs. Troy
Dec. 22	Las Vegas	Oregon State vs. BYU
Dec. 23	Poinsettia	Utah vs. Arizona State
Dec. 24	Hawaii	Southern Miss vs. Fresno State
Dec. 26	Meineke	West Virginia vs. N.C. State
Dec. 26	Motor City	Northwestern vs. Central Michigan
Dec. 26	Emerald	UCLA vs. Miami
Dec. 27	Music City	Clemson vs. Arkansas
Dec. 28	Independence	Colorado vs. Western Michigan
Dec. 29	Champ Sports	North Carolina vs. Wisconsin
Dec. 30	EagleBank	Wake Forest vs. Ball State
Dec. 30	Humanitarian	Nevada vs. Air Force
Dec. 30	Holiday	Cal vs. Nebraska
Dec. 30	Texas	Tulsa vs. Navy
Dec. 31	Sun	Oregon vs. Texas Tech
Dec. 31	Chick-fil-A	Georgia Tech vs. Tennessee
Dec. 31	Insight	Michigan vs. Missouri
Dec. 31	Armed Forces	TCU vs. Houston
Jan. 1	Outback	Georgia vs. Illinois
Jan. 1	Capital One	Alabama vs. Iowa
Jan. 1	Gator	Florida State vs. Notre Dame
Jan. 2	International	Pittsburgh vs. Temple
Jan. 2	Cotton	Oklahoma State vs. LSU
Jan. 2	PapaJohns	Cincinnati vs. Minnesota
Jan. 2	Liberty	UTEP vs. Auburn
Jan. 2	Alamo	Kansas vs. Michigan State
Jan. 6	GMAC	Ohio vs. Florida Atlantic

BCS MATCHUPS

Jan. 1	Rose	USC vs. Ohio State
Jan. 1	Sugar	Ole Miss vs. Rutgers
Jan. 4	Fiesta	Oklahoma vs. Boise State
Jan. 5	Orange	Virginia Tech vs. Penn State
Jan. 7	BCS	Florida vs. Texas



Oklahoma TE
Jermaine Gresham



Florida MLB
Brandon Spikes

All-America Team

OFFENSE

QB	Tim Tebow	Florida
RB	Jonathan Dwyer	Georgia Tech
RB	Jahvid Best	Cal
WR	Dez Bryant	Oklahoma State
WR	Arrelious Benn	Illinois
TE	Jermaine Gresham	Oklahoma
C	Kristofer O'Dowd	USC
G	Sergio Render	Virginia Tech
G	Jeff Byers	USC
T	Ciron Black	LSU
T	Bryan Bulaga	Iowa

DEFENSE

DE	Jerry Hughes	TCU
DE	Carlos Dunlap	Florida
DT	Terrence Cody	Alabama
DT	Gerald McCoy	Oklahoma
MLB	Brandon Spikes	Florida
OLB	Sergio Kindle	Texas
OLB	Sean Weatherspoon	Missouri
CB	Trevard Lindley	Kentucky
CB	Joe Haden	Florida
SS	Eric Berry	Tennessee
FS	Taylor Mays	USC
K	Kai Forbath	UCLA
KR	Perrish Cox	Oklahoma State
P	Ross Thevenot	Tulane
PR	Brandon James	Florida

PETER READ MILLER (GRESHAM); TIM LARSON/ICON SMI (SPIKES)

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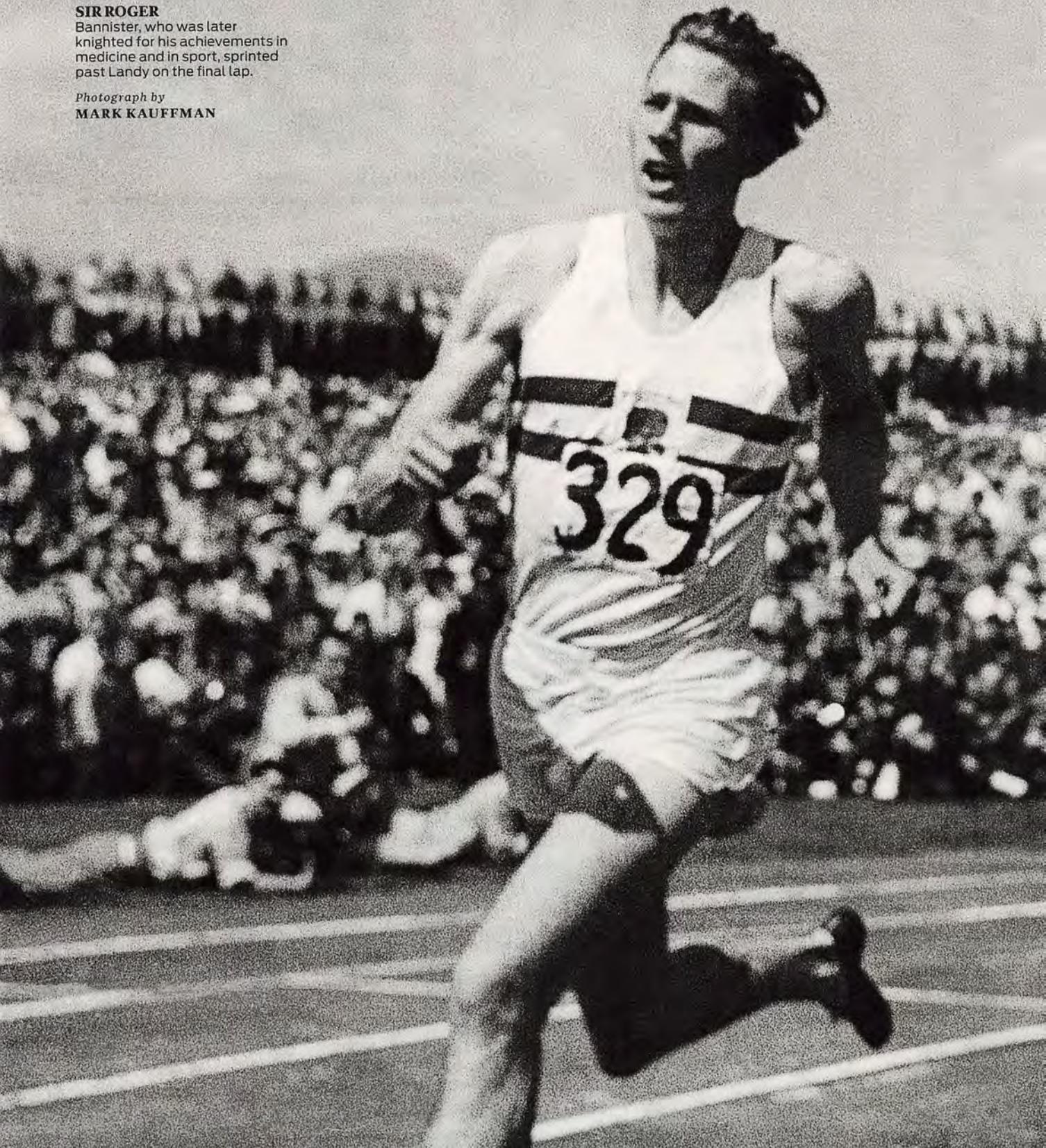
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The Vault

SIR ROGER

Bannister, who was later knighted for his achievements in medicine and in sport, sprinted past Landy on the final lap.

Photograph by
MARK KAUFFMAN





EXCERPT | Aug. 16, 1954

Miracle Milers

The race between the world's first four-minute men

Three months after breaking the barrier Roger Bannister battled the man who had since lowered his record. Paul O'Neil wrote in SI's debut issue.

The art of running the mile consists, in essence, of reaching the threshold of unconsciousness at the instant of breasting the tape. It is not an easy process, for the body rebels against such agonizing usage and must be disciplined by the spirit and the mind. It is infinitely more difficult in the amphitheater of competition, for then the runner must remain alert and cunning despite the fogs of fatigue and pain; his instinctive calculation of pace must encompass maneuvers for position, and he must harbor strength to answer the moves of other men before expending his last reserves. Few events in sport offer so ultimate a test, and the world of track has never seen anything equal to the "Mile of the Century," which England's Dr. Roger Gilbert Bannister—the tall, pale-skinned explorer of human exhaustion who first crashed the four-minute barrier—won last Saturday from Australia's world-record holder, John Michael Landy.

It was the most widely heralded and universally contemplated footnote of all time. Thirty-two thousand people jostled and screamed while it was run in Vancouver's new Empire Stadium, millions followed it by television. Despite the necessity of jockeying on the early turns and of moving up in a field of six other good men, Bannister ran a blazing 3:58.8 and Landy 3:59.6. Landy's world record of 3:58 still stood, but on the battlefield Landy was beaten, man to man, and Roger Bannister reigned again as the giant of modern track.

Bannister retired from running that December to study medicine. He was named SI's 1954 Sportsman of the Year, then later became a neurologist.

Cover Gallery

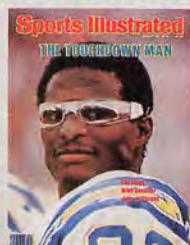
This Week in SI



1967

Carl Yastrzemski

was en route to winning the Triple Crown and leading the reformed Red Sox (the players used to party too much, they admitted) to their first pennant since 1946.



1979

John Jefferson

the NFL's leader in TD catches as a Chargers rookie in '78, looked forward to another big season after San Diego drafted touted tight end Kellen Winslow.



1991

John Daly

was an unknown rookie until he won the PGA by walloping drives so prodigious they left seasoned pros in awe. "This is like a miracle," said Daly, 25.

ART SHAY (YASTRZEMSKI); HANK DELESINASSE STUDIOS (JEFFERSON); JACQUELINE DUVOISIN (DALY)

NFL

MLB

NBA

College Football

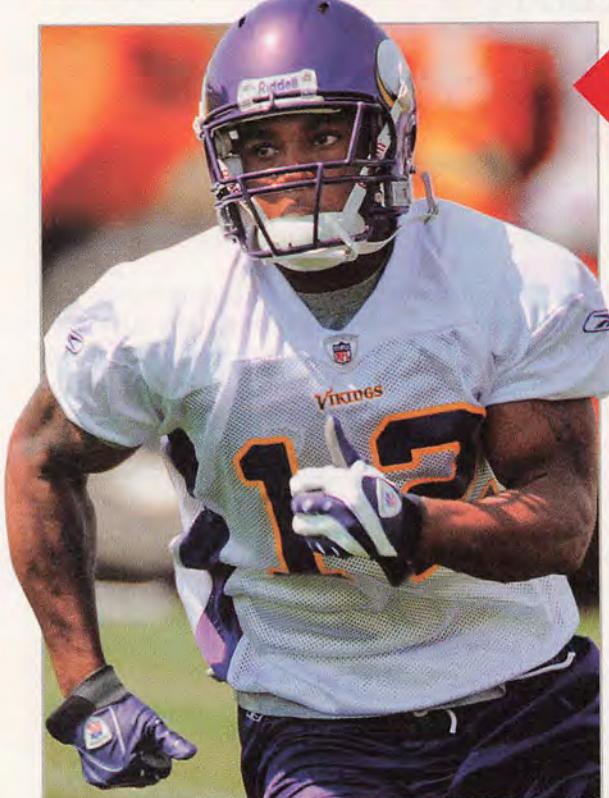
Golf

Editor's
Choice

POSTCARDS FROM CAMP

SI's Peter King checks in with the latest tidbits from Vikings camp in Mankato, Minn.:

Percy Harvin (left) is making an immediate impact. Drafted with the 22nd pick in the first round last April, Harvin is being run ragged by coach Brad Childress, offensive coordinator Darrell Bevell and receivers coach George Stewart. They're working him hard. "We want to overload him now and teach him as much as we can," Bevell said. "When the season starts, we don't want his head swimming with everything. We just want him to play."



MOST POPULAR



PETER KING'S

Monday Morning Quarterback
Albert Haynesworth looks happy after his first day in Redskins camp



JOHN P. LOPEZ'S

Inside the NFL
Are Tony Romo and the Cowboys Super Bowl-worthy?



SI.COM'S

25 Things We Miss in Football
Lester Hayes and the glory days on the gridiron

ON THE GO



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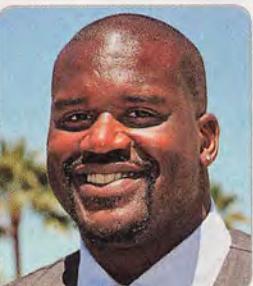
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GALLERIES



Jessica Moore ▶ WNBA



Shaquille O'Neal ▶ Pop Culture



Justin Morneau ▶ Fantasy Stud

Three Strikes

SI's lead baseball writer goes inside the game. This is just a taste of what you'll get online.

1 This year has not been kind to future Hall of Famers **Tom Glavine** and **John Smoltz** (below). First, Glavine gets dumped by the Braves while finishing a minor league rehab assignment and remains unsigned. Now Glavine's former Atlanta teammate Smoltz, in the wake of one of the worst of his 474 big league starts last Thursday night in New York against the Yankees, essentially gets cut from the Red Sox in what could be a humbling end to his storied career.



2 There's even more bad news for Boston. And it's not just that they let pitcher **Chad Gaudin** pass through waivers to help the Yankees. It's that they have no shortstop. **Jed Lowrie**, overmatched much of this year (he's hitting .048 against power pitchers), left last Thursday's game with numbness in his left arm, including his surgically repaired wrist and fingers.

3 The Yankees are the best team in the AL right now. Yes, the Angels match up well against them, and the Red Sox still have time to fix their flaws, but New York is a ferocious offensive team that wears down opponents, not so much with its ability to draw out at bats but with the constant threat of power.



A NOTE ON 70 YEARS IN CAR
INSURANCE FROM ONE OF THE
GIANTS IN THE INDUSTRY.

(WELL, NOT IN TERMS OF
HEIGHT, OF COURSE.)

What the Gecko lacks in stature he certainly makes up for in ability. In fact, under the ownership of Warren Buffett's Berkshire Hathaway Inc., he's helped GEICO rise to become the nation's third-largest car insurance company. Of course, the fact that GEICO has been helping people save money on car insurance for over 70 years hasn't hurt either. And when it comes to financial security, GEICO is consistently ranked "excellent" or better by independent experts. But even though it's not common practice to have geckos in the highest levels of business, this one inspired three million drivers to switch to GEICO last year (and never missed a day of work). Perhaps proving that you can be both big and small at the same time.

GEICO

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Hey, Ump, Just Make the Call

by PHIL TAYLOR

You know what I've always wanted to know about referees and umpires? Absolutely nothing. They do not move the needle a millimeter on my curiosity scale. It's nothing personal—in fact, it is extremely impersonal, which is just the approach I prefer from officials. Other than accuracy, the most desirable quality in refs and umps is the absence of personality. They should be charisma-free, as bland as baby food.

But officials keep inserting themselves into the middle of the action, often because of glaring errors—like NBA ref Mark Wunderlich's missing a crucial intentional foul call in a Mavericks-Nuggets playoff game last spring—or, even worse, with ridiculous power trips. On Sunday home plate umpire Ed Rapuano ejected Phillies centerfielder Shane Victorino, who was about 350 feet away, for arguing balls and strikes. Officials have become so intrusive that, against my will, they have crept into my consciousness as distinct characters.

I wish I couldn't immediately recognize NBA ref Dick Bavetta, who resembles the farmer with the pitchfork in *American Gothic*, or easily picture the sweat dripping from Joey Crawford's shaved dome. I'm trying to forget that I know the nicknames of umpires like Cowboy Joe West and Balkin' Bob Davidson, and that Tim McClelland takes longer to signal a strike than I take to make a sandwich. But basketball and baseball arbiters now draw so much attention as individuals, whether intentionally or not, that they're impossible to ignore.

That's why the opening of NFL training camps last week was a welcome event—it means that the return of refreshingly anonymous officials is almost upon us. Ed Hochuli and his Bunyanesque biceps are familiar, but 99% of NFL refs and umps and judges would be unrecognizable even if they walked into your kitchen and flagged you for illegal use of the pans. Do the names Michael Banks, Derick Bowers, Roy Ellison, Keith Ferguson and Mark Perlman mean anything to you? They were members of the Super Bowl crew last February, and I'm happy to report that I've never heard of any of them.

NFL officials are no more competent than their counterparts in other sports, but they do their jobs without making themselves nearly as noticeable. They toss their flags, pick them up and return quickly to the background, hardly ever giving the impression that they consider themselves part of the show. While big league umps take the time to go jaw-to-jaw in arguments with players and managers, NFL officials rarely even take their eyes off the field when coaches blast them from the sidelines. While certain NBA referees develop reputations for



What could possibly be next? NBA referees with entourages, rolling up to the nightclubs? Major league umps dating Kardashian sisters?

quick triggers or slow fuses, NFL officials seem as interchangeable as AA batteries.

There was a time when more officials strove for that kind of anonymity. "The greatest compliment I could be paid," Tom Gorman, an umpire from 1951 to '76, once said, "was when somebody asked, 'Who umped that game?'" But for too many of Gorman's successors, keeping a low profile is harder than deciding whether a batter checked his swing or went around.

It's not entirely their fault: Minor league umps and refs often feel the need to develop a distinctive style in order to get noticed and promoted. Beyond that, increased media interest has officials believing that they are part of the entertainment. Television networks put tiny microphones on them and play back their in-game conversations. Broadcasters discuss the variation in individual umps' strike zones or how tightly some refs call touch fouls, and they clue viewers in on their personal stories.

As a result, I am now Rain Man when it comes to officials. *Hunter Wendelstedt, Son of Harry, former umpire. Harry worked with Shag Crawford, father of umpire Jerry and referee Joey. More family connections: The late Darelle Garretson, one-time chief of NBA officials, had a refereeing son Ron, who sometimes works with Leon Wood, a member of the 1984 U.S. Olympic team. Other former players: Ref Bernie Fryer was once a Trail Blazer. . . .*

I'm not the only one who has soaked this up, of course. When Bavetta challenged Charles Barkley to a race during All-Star weekend in 2007, reporters were as interested in the 67-year-old ref as in Sir Charles. What could possibly be next? Referees with entourages, rolling up to the nightclubs? Umpires dating Kardashian sisters?

Once officials get a whiff of fame, it raises the possibility that they'll play to the crowd or the cameras, even if subconsciously. A ref or ump who is concerned with his image will also be less likely to risk looking weak or intimidated. Maybe that's what happened to home plate umpire Bill Hohn in Miami last month. After he got an earful from Braves catcher Brian McCann over a strike call, the play-by-play went like this: Bill Hohn stopped the game. Bill Hohn went over to Atlanta's dugout and confronted the team. Bill Hohn ejected manager Bobby Cox. Bill Hohn tossed McCann at the start of the next half inning. Bill Hohn fist-bumped Marlins catcher John Baker after Florida's win. Bill Hohn was a topic of discussion among TV sports talking heads the next day. I'm betting that fans didn't go home that night asking, "Who umped that game?"

Here's a question for Hohn and other umps and referees: Do you still want them to ask? □

Talk Back

If you want to comment on POINT AFTER or suggest a topic, send an e-mail to PointAfter@si.timelinc.com

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HERRINGBONE BLAZER: AIN'T GONNA HAPPEN
A PAIR OF PLEATED SLACKS: I DON'T THINK SO
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